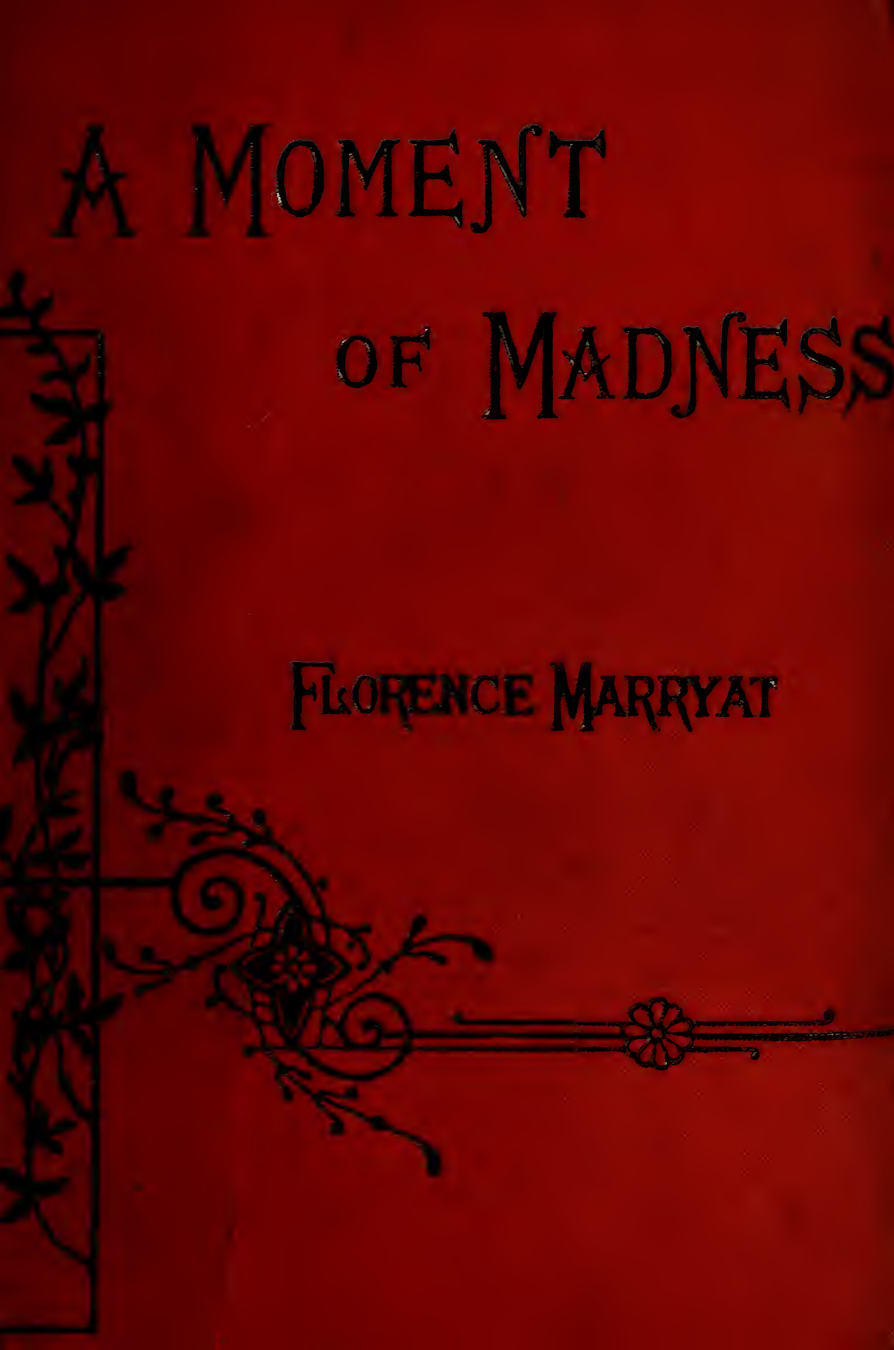
A Moment of Madness

Florence Marryat



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A MOMENT OF MADNESS,

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,
AUTHOR OF 'PHYLLIDA,' 'FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SENT TO HIS DEATH

(*Continued*).

I HAD been dreaming of the ghost, and was conscious in a moment, and sitting up in bed. Whatever I had thought of Bessie's tales before, I believed them now, for I could distinctly hear the low, gasping breath which follows an inordinate fit of sobbing, drawn apparently close to us.

'What time is it?' I exclaimed.

'It is just three. I have been listening to it for some time, but did not like to rouse you till I was sure. Is the door locked?'

'Yes; but I will unlock it at once,' I said, springing out of bed.

'No, no! pray do not,' cried Bessie, clinging to me. 'What are you doing? It might come into the room.'

'My dear Bessie, if it is a ghost, no locks can keep it out; and if it is not a ghost, what harm can it do us by entering? Pray be reasonable. We shall never clear up this mystery if we are not a little brave!'

I shook her off, and approached the door, whilst she rushed back to her own bed.

I confess that as I turned the key in the lock I felt very nervous. Do what we will, it is hard to accustom ourselves to think lightly of communication with the dead; neither did I relish the idea of a trick being played us in that lonely house at dead of night. The light was burning brightly in my room, but as I threw the door open, the corridor seemed dark and empty. I stood upon the threshold and looked from right to left. What was that white, tall shadow in the doorway of the spare room?

I called out, 'Who are you? What do you want?' The answer I received was a quick sob and a rustle. Then I saw an indistinct figure move down the passage with a hurried step, and disappear somewhere at the further end.

Shall I confess that for all my boasted strength I had not the courage to follow it? It was one thing to have stood on the threshold of my lighted room and

addressed the apparition, and another to venture out into the cold and darkness in pursuit of it. I retreated to Bessie's bedroom instead.

'I have seen it!' I exclaimed. 'I believe that you are right, Bessie, and for the first time in my life I have seen a ghost. I meant to have followed it; but I really felt I couldn't. To-morrow night I may have more courage. But hark! what is that noise? Isn't it baby crying?'

'Never mind *baby;* Mrs Graham will attend to him,' said Bessie. 'Lock the door again, Dolly dear, do, and get into bed with me, or I sha'n't sleep another wink to-night. I'm shaking from head to foot as it is.'

But the cries from baby's room became more distinct; and my courage had returned to me.

'Let me go and see what is the matter with little Dick first,' I said, taking up the lighted candle.

Bessie yelled at being kept alone in the dark, but I could not have lain down again without ascertaining what ailed the little fellow; so, disregarding her remonstrances, I walked off to Mrs Graham's room. Her door was unlocked, and I entered without knocking.

The child was still crying lustily; and what was my surprise to find his nurse, utterly regardless of the noise, sitting up in bed, with scared wide-open eyes, talking vehemently.

'Go away!' she was exclaiming in a loud voice; 'Go away! and don't come back again. You let the water in each time you open the door: I tell you we don't want you! Go away, I say, and *don't come back again!*'

She halted for a moment at this juncture, and I was about to waken her from what I perceived was a nightmare, when she suddenly clapped her hands before her eyes and screamed.

'Ah, Heavens! a wave—a fearful wave that covers the deck—that covers everything. Where is he? Where is he gone to? I have sent him to his death! Edward! Edward! come back to me! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean it! Ah! Lord have pity on me.'

Her agitation was rising so rapidly, and the baby was crying so violently, that I thought it time to interfere.

'Mrs Graham!' I exclaimed, shaking her by the arm, 'wake up. Don't you hear the baby wants you?'

She turned her big eyes upon me in such

a pitiful vacuous way. Then she recognised me, and looked frightened.

'Have I been dreaming? Have I been saying anything? Oh! I am so sorry, she said apologetically, as she caught up the child and held it to her breast.

'You have only been talking a little in your sleep,' I replied soothingly; 'don't be alarmed; you said nothing out of the common way, and there is no one here but myself.'

She did not answer, but as she held the child I saw how her arms trembled.

'Your agitation is the worst thing possible for the baby, you know; and you must try and calm yourself for his sake,' I continued.

'I should be so sorry to hurt him,' she murmured; 'and I will try and not dream again, if it is possible.'

'Shall I fetch you anything?'

'Oh no, madam, thank you. The best thing I can do is to go to sleep again. There is nothing for me but sleep—and prayer,' she added in a whisper.

I felt deeply interested in this young woman. There was an air of patient mournfulness about her that betokened deep suffering; and as I returned to my room I resolved to do my best to be of use

to her. She so completely occupied my thoughts, indeed, that I had forgotten all about the ghost, till Bessie asked me how I could possibly walk through the corridor with so composed a step.

'My dear, I was thinking about baby and his nurse, and quite forgot to be frightened. Yes, they are all right now, and going to sleep again comfortably; and I think the ghost must have followed their example, for certainly there were no signs of its presence as I returned: so I think we had better try to make up for our broken rest by a few hours' sleep.'

Bessie was quite ready to do so; but for my own part I lay awake until the loitering dawn broke through the shuttered windows.

Mr Maclean's absence was really, I found, not to be prolonged beyond the two nights; so I could write Dick word to fetch me home on the following day; but I resolved, before I went, to have some sort of explanatory conversation with Mrs Graham, with respect to her dream of the night before. I told nothing of it to Bessie; for I felt she would spoil everything perhaps by her awkwardness in handling the subject, or wound the poor girl's feelings by too abrupt a reference to

her grief. But I watched Mrs Graham leave the house at about eleven o'clock to take her little charge out for his morning walk, and as soon as Bessie descended to the kitchen quarters to give her orders for the day, I put on my bonnet and shawl and ran after the nurse. There was a cold wind blowing from the north, and I knew I should find her in the sheltered shrubbery, where she had been told to take the child. It extended for some distance, and when I came up with her we were quite out of sight and hearing of the house.

'A fine cold morning!' I remarked, by way of a beginning.

'Very cold, madam.'

'With the wind in the north. A nasty day for the sea—I pity the ships in the channel.'

To this she made no response.

'Have you ever been on the sea, Mrs Graham?'

'Yes! once!' with a shudder.

'And did you like it?'

'Like it? Oh! for God's sake, madam, don't speak of it, for I cannot bear the thought even.'

'You were unfortunate, perhaps? You had experience of a storm? But the sea is not always rough, Mrs Graham.'

She was silent, and I looked in her face, and saw the tears streaming down it.

'My dear girl,' I said, placing my hand on her shoulder, 'don't think me unkind. I have guessed somewhat of your history, and I feel for you—oh, so deeply. Confide in me; my husband is a man of influence, and I may be of use to you. I see that you are superior to the position you hold, and I have conceived an interest in you. Don't keep your sorrows locked in your own breast, or they will eat out your very heart and life.'

As I spoke she began to sob piteously.

'You are not doing right by this poor little baby, nor his parents,' I continued, by brooding over a silent grief. You will injure his health, when perhaps if you will tell us all, we may be able to comfort you.'

'No one can comfort me, madam! I am beyond all relief.'

'No one dare say that in this world, which God rules according to His will. You cannot tell what solace He may hold in the future for you.'

'I have no future,' she said sadly. 'If you think I am likely to injure this little one,' pressing it tightly to her bosom, 'I am very, very sorry; but to have something to love and care for, seemed to be

the only thing to prevent my going mad.'

'Mrs Graham, I don't wish to be impertinently curious, but I want to hear your story. Won't you tell it to me?'

'If you do, you will hate me—as I hate myself.'

'I hardly think that possible. Of what crime can you be guilty, to accuse yourself so bitterly.'

'*I am a murderess!*'

She brought out the words so vehemently that I started. Was it possible she spoke the truth? And yet I had seen in our gaol, such young and superior-looking criminals, that I knew it *might* be possible. My thoughts flew at once to her child.

'Was it the baby?' I cried. 'Oh! my poor child! what drove you to such an awful deed?'

'Do you pity me still?'

'I pity you with all my heart.'

'Ah! madam; you are too good.'

She trembled so violently that I had taken the child from her arms, and as I stood there in the wintry path, she sank down upon her knees before me and kissed the border of my shawl, and hid her face in it and cried.

'Mrs Graham, I cannot believe it!'

'No! you need not believe it. In that sense I did not kill my child. God took it away from me in anger; but I sent its father, my dearly-loved husband, to his death.'

'Sent him to his death!'

'Ah, madam! have pity on me and listen. We had been married but six months, and we loved each other, ah! so dearly. He was a clerk in a city firm, and his employers sent him over to Ireland on business. We could not bear to part—we went together. In order to return to England we embarked in a small sailing vessel, and we had a fearful storm in crossing. The sea ran mountains high, and the women on board were assembled together in a deck cabin. The men to whom they belonged kept looking in every now and then to tell them how we were getting on, and every time the door of the cabin was opened, the sea rushed in and wetted them. They grew impatient, I the most of all; and when my dear husband, in his anxiety lest I should be frightened at our danger, put his head in for the third or fourth time I called out, saying, 'Go away, Edward, and *don't come back again.*' And he went away, and he never did come back. Ah, Heaven! have mercy upon me!'

'My poor girl! how did it happen?'

'He was washed off the deck, madam, by a huge wave that nearly swamped the ship—so they told me afterwards. But I never saw him more! The glimpse I had of his bonnie face as it was thrust in at the half-opened door, beaming with love and anxiety, was the last glimpse I was ever to have in this world—and I sent him to his death. I said, 'Go away, and don't come back—and he never came back!'—he never came back!'

Her grief was so violent I almost thought she would have swooned at my feet. I tried to direct her thoughts in another direction.

'Have you no friends to go to, Mrs Graham?'

'None of my own, madam. I was a soldier's orphan from the Home when Edward married me. And I could not go to his.'

'How did you lose your baby?'

'It died of my grief, I suppose; it only lived a few days. And then they advised me at the hospital to get a situation as wet nurse; and I thought the care of an infant might soothe me a little. But my sorrow is past cure.'

'You have bad dreams at night, I fear.'

'Oh! such awful dreams! He is always

calling me—calling me to go to him, and I can find him nowhere; or else I am in the ship again, and see that which I never did see—the cruel wave that washed him from me!'

'Do you feel strong enough to take the child again?'

She had risen by this time, and was, comparatively speaking, calm. She held out her arms mechanically. I put the baby in them, and then stooped and kissed her swollen eyes and burning forehead.

'I will not discuss this subject with you further to-day,' I said; 'but you have found a friend. Go on with your walk, child, and may God comfort you. I am glad you have told me the story of your grief.'

I hurried back to Bessie, fearful lest she might come in search of me, and insist upon hearing the reason of Mrs Graham's tears. There was no doubt of one thing—another nurse must be found as soon as possible for little Dick, and I must take on myself the responsibility of providing for his present one. But all that required my husband's permission and advice, and I must wait till I had seen and confided in him.

Bessie, who had discovered that, not-

withstanding my deplorable deficiency in the way of children, I could cut out their garments far better than she could do herself, had provided a delightful entertainment for me in the shape of half-a-dozen frocks to be made ready for the nurse's hands, and the whole afternoon was spent in snipping and piecing and tacking together. But I didn't grumble; my mind was too much occupied with poor Mrs Graham and her pathetic story. I thought of it so much that the temporary fear evoked by the apparition of the night before had totally evaporated. In the presence of a real, substantial human grief, we can hardly spare time for imaginary horrors.

As bed-time recurred, and Bessie and I locked ourselves into our stronghold, I refused the half of the bed she offered me, and preferred to retain my own. I even made up my mind, if possible, not to sleep, but to watch for the mysterious sounds, and be the first to investigate them. So I would not put out my candle, but lay in bed reading long after Bessie's snores had announced her departure to the land of dreams.

I had come to the end of my book, my candle, and my patience, and was just about

to give up the vigil as a failure, when I heard footsteps distinctly sounding along the corridor. I was out of bed in a moment, with my hand upon the lock of the door. I waited till the steps had passed my room, and then I turned the key and looked gently out. The same white figure I had seen the night before was standing a little beyond me, its course arrested, as it would appear, by the slight sound of unlocking the door.

'Now or never,' I thought to myself. 'Dick always says I am the bravest woman he ever met, and I will try and prove him true. Why should I be afraid? Even if this *is* a spirit, God is over IT and us, alike!'

So I stepped out into the passage, just as I should sit down to have a tooth drawn. The figure had recommenced walking, and was some paces farther from me. I followed it, saying softly, 'What are you? Speak to me.' But it did not turn, but went on, clasping its hands, and talking rapidly to itself.

A sudden thought flashed across my mind. In a moment I felt sure that I was right, and had solved the mystery of Poplar Farm. I placed myself full in the path of the apparition, and as the end of

the corridor forced it to turn and retrace its steps, I met face to face my poor, pretty Mrs Graham, with the flaxen hair she usually kept concealed beneath her widow's cap, streaming over her shoulders and giving her a most weird and unearthly appearance.

'Edward! Edward!' she was whispering in a feverish, uncertain manner, 'where are you? It is so dark here and so cold. Put out your hand and lead me. I want to come to you, darling; I want to come to you.'

I stretched out my own hand and took hers. She clung to me joyfully.

'Is it you?' she exclaimed, in the undisturbed voice of a sleep-walker. 'Have I found you again? Oh, Edward! I have been trying to find you for so long—so long, and I thought we were parted for ever.'

I drew her gently along to her own room and put her in her bed, whilst she continued to talk to me in the fond, low tones in which she thought she was addressing her dead husband.

. . . . . .

Bessie slept through it all.

Of course I told her all about it next day, and equally, of course, she did not believe half what I said. She did not like

the idea of parting with her cherished grievance in the shape of the ghost, nor having the trouble of changing her wet nurse. So I left her, as soon as ever Dick arrived, rather disgusted with the manner in which she had received my efforts for her good, but still determined to do what I could in the way of befriending Mrs Graham. As I told her the last thing, when I ran up to the nursery to say good-bye to little Dick, and received her grateful thanks in reply. 'Only nothing,' she said with a deep sigh, 'could ever do her any good in this world again.'

'But I'm determined to get her out of Poplar Farm,' I said to Dick, as we drove homeward, after I had told him this long-winded story. 'She's killing the baby and herself too. She ought to have a much more cheerful home and active employment. Now, can't you think of something for her to do about the gaol or the hospital, like a dear, darling old boy as you are?'

'Well, I don't quite see how you can take Mrs Maclean's servant away from her against her will, Dolly. If Mrs Graham leaves, it will be a different thing; but as things are, I'm afraid you ought not to interfere.'

I called him a wretch; but I knew he

was right for all that, and determined to take his advice and wait patiently to see how things turned out. And, as it happened, I had not long to wait, for a week afterwards I received this doleful epistle from Bessie:—

'My dear Dolly,—I am perfectly miserable; nothing ever goes right with me. Tom threw Charlie out of the wheelbarrow yesterday, and cut his forehead right across. He will be scarred for life. And nurse has entirely spoiled those frocks you were so kind as to cut out for Lily and Bessie. She is so obstinate, she would have her own way, and the children positively cannot get into them. But the worst news of all is, that Mrs Graham is going to leave me, and I have had to wean baby, and put him on the bottle.'

'Hurrah!' I cried, 'it's all right. I shall get that poor child here after all, and be able to patch up her broken life. No, I sha'n't, though,' I continued, as I went on reading, and then, to my husband's astonishment, I fell on his neck, and burst into tears. 'Oh, Dick, Dick, Dick, I *am* so glad!'

'Halloa! what's up now?' said that

vulgar Dick, in his own way of expressing things.

'My darling, she's got him again.'

'Who's got which?'

'Mrs Graham's husband has returned. He wasn't drowned, but let me finish the letter,' and drying my eyes I went on—

'Just imagine how awkward and unpleasant for me. The other evening there was an awful screaming in the kitchen, and when I went down, I found Mrs Graham fainted dead away in the arms of a man. I was very angry at first, naturally; but when she recovered I found it was her husband whom she thought was drowned at sea three months ago. It seems he was picked up insensible by some ship, and taken to Spain, where he had a fever, and was delirious, and all that sort of thing; and when he recovered, he worked his way home before the mast, and had only just found out where his wife lived. But I think it is excessively unreasonable of people to take situations, and say they're widows, and then—'

'Oh, don't read any more of that rubbish, for heaven's sake!' said Dick, irreverently. 'The long and the short of the

matter is, that the girl's got her man again.'

'Oh! I *am* so thankful!' I exclaimed, with the tears still in my eyes; I couldn't help it, they *would* come. 'Poor child! poor, desolate, heart-broken child! What a heaven earth must appear to her to-day. Dick, will you drive me over to the farm directly after breakfast? I want to see her and congratulate her.'

'You seem to take a vast interest in this Mrs Graham, and her joys and sorrows,' said Dick; 'why is it, Dolly?'

'Because I can sympathise with them so deeply. Because—because—oh, Dick, *you* know—because God has given me—you, and I am the very happiest woman in all the world.'

THE END.

LOST IN THE MARSHES.

ON the east coast of the county of Norfolk, there lay a village which shall be distinguished by the name of Corston. It was bounded on the one side by the sea, on the other by the open country, and beside the two or three gentleman farmers whose possessions comprised all the agricultural land within a radius of five miles, it could boast of a church and resident parson—a coastguard with its attendant officer, and above all, close contiguity with Rooklands, the estate of the Earl of Worcester. And those who are acquainted with the moral and social aspect, as it existed forty or fifty years ago, of the more insignificant villages of Norfolk, will acknowledge that Corston was favoured above its fellows. The sea coast in its vicinity brought many a gay

riding party over from Rooklands, either to enjoy the fresh breezes, or to bathe in the sparkling waves from some sequestered nook, whilst the congregation of the church was made up of drafts from some four or five outlying hamlets which had not the advantage of a place of worship of their own. Conceive then what a much larger audience the Corston parson could depend upon, when the women had a prospect of seeing the bonnets from ten miles round (to say nothing of a chance of the Rookland aristocrats taking it into their heads to drive out), in addition to listening to his somewhat uninteresting sermons. The coastguard, too, was a cause of constant excitement, on account of the Admiralty having been in the habit of bestowing the appointment on old, worn-out, half-pay lieutenants who chose to expire almost as soon as they obtained it, and really, notwithstanding the church and the parson and Rooklands, there was not much in Corston worth living for. But at the time this story opens, the charge of the coast had not long been put in the hands of (comparatively speaking) a young and hale man who bid fair to keep anybody else out of it for a long while to come. His office was no sinecure though, for, notwithstand-

ing the difficulty of landing, the coast was a celebrated one for smugglers, and as soon as the dark months of winter set in there was no lack of work for the preventive officers. For the village of Corston did not, of itself, run down to the sea. Between it and the ocean there lay the salt marshes, a bleak, desolate tract of land, which no skill or perseverance could reclaim from apparent uselessness. Except to the samphire and cockle-gatherers, the salt marshes of Corston were an arid wilderness which could yield no fruit. Many a farmer had looked longingly across the wide waste which terminated only with the shingled beach, and wondered if it were possible to utilise it. But as it had been from the beginning, so it remained until that day; its stinted vegetation affording shelter for sea-fowl and smugglers' booty only, and its brackish waters that flowed and ebbed with the tides, tainting the best springs on the level ground of Corston. It was the existence of these marshes that rendered the coastguard necessary to the village, which would otherwise have become a perfect nest of smugglers. As it was, notwithstanding all the vigilance of Mr John Burton and his men, many a keg of spirits and roll of tobacco were landed

on the coast of Corston, and many a man in the place was marked by them as guilty, though never discovered. For they who had lived by the salt marshes all their lives were cunning as to their properties, and knew just where they might bury their illegal possessions with impunity when the tide was low, and find them safe when it had flowed and ebbed again. Everyone was not so fortunate. Lives had been lost in the marshes before now—ay, and of Corston men too, and several dark tales were told by the gossips of the village of the quagmires and quicksands that existed in various parts of them, which looked, although they never were, both firm and dry, but had the power to draw man and horse with the temerity to step upon them, into their unfathomable depths. But if the smugglers kept Mr Burton and his men fully occupied on the sea shore, the poachers did no less for Lord Worcester's band of gamekeepers at Rooklands; and Farmer Murray, who had a drop of Scotch blood running in his veins, and was never so much alive as when his own interests were concerned, had only saved his game for the last three years by having been fortunate enough to take the biggest poacher in Corston, red-handed, and let him off on

condition that he became his keeper and preserved his covers from future violence. 'Set a thief to catch a thief' is a time-honoured saying, and Farmer Murray found it answer. Isaac Barnes, the unscrupulous poacher, became a model gamekeeper, and the midnight rest of the inhabitants of Mavis Farm had never been disturbed by a stray shot since; though the eldest son, George Murray, had been heard to affirm that half the fun of his life was gone now that there was no chance of a tussle with the poachers. Such was the state of Corston some forty years ago. The villagers were rough, uneducated, and lawless, and the general condition of the residents, vapid and uninteresting enough to have provoked any amount of wickedness, if only for the sake of change or excitement.

. . . . . .

It was the end of September, and the close of a glorious summer. The harvest had been abundant and the Norfolk soil, which knows so well how to yield her fruits in due season, was like an exhausted mother which had just been delivered of her abundance. The last sheaves of golden corn were standing in the fields ready to be carried to the threshing-barn, the trees in the orchards were weighed down with

their wealth of pears and apples, and in every lane clusters of bare-headed children with their hands full of nuts and their faces stained with blackberry juice, proved how nature had showered her bounties on rich and poor alike. Lizzie Locke, who was making her way slowly in the direction of the village, with a huge basket on her arm, stopped more than once to wipe her hot face, and pull the sun bonnet she wore further over her eyes, although in another couple of days the October moon would have risen upon the land. She was a young girl of not more than eighteen or twenty years, and, as her dress denoted, bred from the labouring classes. Not pretty—unless soft brown hair, a fair skin and delicate features, can make a woman so—but much more refined in appearance than the generality of her kind. The hands that grasped the handle of her heavy basket had evidently never done much hard work, nor were her feet broadened or her back bent with early toiling in the turnip and the harvest fields. The reason of this was apparent as soon as she turned her eyes toward you. Quiet blue eyes shaded by long lashes, that seldom unveiled them—eyes that, under more fortuitous circumstances, might have flashed and

sparkled with roguish mirth, but that seemed to bear now a settled melancholy in them, even when her mouth smiled: eyes, in fact, that had been blinded from their birth.

Poor Lizzie Locke! There was a true and great soul burning in her breast, but the windows were darkened and it had no power to look out upon the world. As she stood still for a few moments' rest for the third or fourth time between the salt marshes and Corston, her quick ear caught the sound of approaching horses' feet, and she drew on one side of the open road to let the rider pass. But instead of that, the animal was drawn up suddenly upon its haunches, and a pleasant young voice rang out in greeting to her.

'Why, Lizzie, is that you? What a careless girl you are—I might have ridden over you.'

'Miss Rosa,' exclaimed the blind girl, as she recognised the voice and smiled brightly in return.

'Of course it's Miss Rosa, and Polly is as fresh as a two-year-old this morning. She always is, when she gets upon the marshes. It's lucky I pulled up in time.'

The new comer, a handsome girl of about the same age as Lizzie, was the only

daughter of Farmer Murray, of Mavis Farm. Spoilt, as one girl amongst half-a-dozen boys is sure to be, it is not to be wondered at that Rosa Murray was impetuous, saucy, and self-willed. For, added to her being her father's darling, and not knowing what it was to be denied anything in his power to give her, Miss Rosa was extremely pretty, with grey eyes and dark hair, and a complexion like a crimson rose. A rich brunette beauty that had gained for her the title of the Damask Rose of Corston, and of which no one was better aware than herself. Many a gentleman visitor at Rooklands had heard of the fame of the farmer's pretty daughter, and ridden over to Corston on purpose to catch a glimpse of her, and it was beginning to be whispered about the village that no one in those parts would be considered good enough for a husband for Miss Rosa, and that Mr Murray was set upon her marrying a gentleman from London, any gentleman from 'London' being considered by the simple rustics to be unavoidably 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form.' Mr Murray was termed a 'gentleman farmer' in that part of the county, because he lived in a substantially-built and well-furnished house, and could afford to keep riding-

horses in his stable and sit down to a dinner spread on a tablecloth every day. But, in reality, his father had commenced life as a ploughman in that very village of Corston, and it was only necessary to bring Farmer Murray into the presence of Lord Worcester and his fashionable friends to see how much of a 'gentleman' he was. He had made the great mistake, however, of sending his children to be educated at schools above their station in life, the consequence of which was that, whilst their tastes and proclivities remained plebeian as his own, they had acquired a self-sufficiency and idea of their merits that accorded ill with their surroundings and threatened to mar their future happiness. The Damask Rose of Corston was the worst example amongst them of the evil alluded to. She had unfortunately lost her mother many years before, so was almost completely her own mistress, and the admiration her beauty excited was fast turning her from a thoughtless flirt into a heartless coquette, the most odious character any woman can assume.

But with her own sex, and when it suited her, Rosa Murray could be agreeable and ingenuous enough, and there was nothing but cordiality in the tone in which

she continued her conversation with Lizzie Locke.

'What are you doing out here by yourself, child? You really ought not to go about alone. It can't be safe.'

'Oh, it's safe enough, Miss Rosa. I've been used to find my way about ever since I could walk. I've just come up from the marshes, and I was going to take these cockles to Mavis Farm to see if the master would like them for his breakfast to-morrow.'

'I daresay they will be very glad of them. George and Bob are awfully fond of cockles. What a lot you've gathered, Lizzie. How do you manage to find them, when you can't see?'

'I know all the likeliest places they stick to, Miss Rosa, as well as I do the chimney corner at home. The tide comes up and leaves them on the bits of rocks, and among the boulders, and some spots are regular beds of them. I've been at it half my life, you see, miss, and I just feel for them with my fingers and pick them off. I can tell a piece of samphire, too, by the sound it makes as I tread over it.'

'It's wonderful,' said Rosa; 'I have often been surprised to see you go about just as though you had the use of your

eyes. It seems to make no difference to you.'

Poor Lizzie sighed.

'Oh, miss! it makes a vast difference —such a difference as you could never understand. But I try to make the best of it, and not be more of a burden upon aunt and Larry than I need to be.'

'I'm sure they don't think you a burden,' said the other girl, warmly. 'But I wonder I didn't meet you on the marshes just now. I've been galloping all over them.'

'Not past Corston Point, I hope, miss,' exclaimed Lizzie, hurriedly.

'Yes, I have! Why not?'

'Oh, don't go there again, Miss Rosa. It isn't safe, particularly on horseback. There's no end of quagmires beyond the Point, and you can never tell when you'll come on one and be swallowed up, horse and all.'

Rosa Murray laughed.

'Why aren't *you* swallowed up then, Lizzie?'

'I know my way, miss, and I know the tread of it too. I can tell when the soil yields more than it should at low tide that I'm nearing a quicksand. When the Almighty takes away one sense He sharpens the others to make up for it. But the

sands are full of danger; some of them are shifting too, and you can never tell if they're firm to-day whether they won't be loose to-morrow. Do take heed, Miss Rosa, and never you ride beyond Corston Point without one of the young gentlemen to take care of you.'

'Well, I'll remember your advice, Lizzie, for I don't want to be swallowed up alive. Good-bye.'

She put her horse in motion and cantered on some little way in advance — then suddenly checked him again and turned back. All Rosa Murray's actions, like her disposition, were quick and impulsive.

'By the way, Lizzie, it's our harvest-home supper to-night. You must be sure and make Larry bring you up to the big barn with him.'

The blind girl crimsoned with pleasure.

'Oh, Miss Rosa! but what should I be doing at your supper? I can't dance, you know. I shall only be in the way.'

'Nonsense! You can hear the singing and the music; we have made papa get a couple of fiddlers over from Wells; and you can eat some supper. You will enjoy yourself, won't you, Lizzie?'

'Yes, miss, I think so—that is, if Larry

and aunt are willing that I should go; but it's very good of you to ask me.'

'You must be sure and come. Tell Larry I insist upon it. We shall all be there, you know, and I shall look out for you, Lizzie, and if I don't see you I shall send some one round to your cottage to fetch you.'

Lizzie Locke smiled and curtsied.

'I'll be sure and tell Larry of your goodness, miss,' she said, 'and he'll be able to thank you better than I can. Here comes a gentleman,' she added, as she withdrew herself modestly from the side of the young lady's horse.

The gentleman, whom Lizzie Locke could have distinguished only as such from the different sound produced by his boots in walking, was Lord Worcester's head gamekeeper, Frederick Darley. He was a young fellow to hold the responsible position he did, being only about thirty years of age, and he had not held it long; but he was the son of the gamekeeper on one of Lord Worcester's estates in the south of England, and his lordship had brought him to Rooklands as soon as ever a vacancy occurred. He was a favourite with his master and his master's guests, being a man of rather superior

breeding and education, but on that very account he was much disliked by all the poor people around. Gamekeepers are not usually popular in a poaching district, but it was not Frederick Darley's position alone that made him a subject for criticism. His crying sin, to use their own term, was that he 'held his head too high.' The velveteen coat he usually wore, with a rose in the button-hole, his curly black hair and waxed moustache, no less than the cigars he smoked and the air with which he affected the society of the gentry, showed the tenants of Rooklands that he considered himself vastly above themselves in position, and they hated him accordingly. The animus had spread to Corston, but Mr Darley was not well enough known there yet to have become a subject for general comment. Lizzie Locke had never even encountered him before.

He was walking from the village on the present occasion swinging a light cane in his hand, and as Rosa Murray looked up at the blind girl's exclamation, she perceived him close to her horse's head.

'Good morning, Miss Murray,' he said, lifting his hat.

'Good morning,' she replied, without mentioning any name, but Lizzie Locke

could detect from the slight tremor in her voice that she was confused at the sudden encounter. 'Were you going down to the beach?'

'I was going nowhere but in search of you.'

'Shall we walk towards home then?' said Rosa, suiting the action to the word. She evidently did not wish the blind girl to be a party to their conversation. She called out 'Good-bye, Lizzie,' once more as she walked her horse away, but before she was out of hearing, the little cockle-gatherer could distinguish her say to the stranger in a fluttered voice,—

'I am so glad you are coming over to our harvest-home to-night.'

'One of the grand gentlemen over from Rooklands come to court Miss Rosa,' she thought in the innocence of her heart, as she turned off the road to take a short cut across the country to Mavis Farm. Meanwhile the couple she alluded to were making their way slowly towards Corston; she, reining in her horse to the pace of a tortoise, whilst he walked by the side with his hand upon the crutch of her saddle.

'Could you doubt for a moment whether I should come?' said Frederick Darley in

answer to Rosa's question. 'Wouldn't I go twenty—fifty miles, for the pleasure of a dance with you?'

'You're such an awful flatterer,' she replied, bridling under the compliment; 'but don't make too sure of a dance with me, for papa and my brothers will be there, and they are so horribly particular about me.'

'And not particularly fond of me—I know it, Miss Murray—but I care nothing at all about it so long as—as—'

'As what?'

'*As you are.*'

'Oh, Mr Darley! how can you talk such nonsense?'

'It's not nonsense! it's sober sense—come, Rosa, tell me the truth. Are you playing with me, or not?'

'What do you mean by "playing"?'

'You know. Are you in earnest or in jest? In fact—do you love me better than you love your father and your brothers?'

'Mr Darley! You know I do!'

'Prove it then, by meeting me to-night.'

'Meeting you? Are you not coming to the harvest-home?'

'I may look in, but I shall not remain long; I shall only use it as an excuse to

come over to Corston. Mr Murray is suspicious of me—I can see that—and your brothers dislike me. I don't care to sit at the table of men who are not my friends, Rosa. But if you will take an opportunity to slip out of the barn and join me in the apple copse, I will wait there for you at ten o'clock.'

'Oh! Frederick—if papa should catch me!'

'I will take care of that! Only say you'll come.'

'I should like to come—it will be so lovely and romantic. Just like a scene in a novel. But I am afraid it is very wrong.'

'What is there wrong in a moonlight stroll? "The summer nights were made for love," Rosa, and we shall have a glorious moon by nine o'clock to-night. You won't disappoint me, will you?'

'No, indeed I won't; but if anything should be discovered you will promise me—'

'What? I will promise you anything in the world.'

'Only that you will shield me from papa's anger—that you will say it was all your fault. For papa is dreadful when he gets in a temper.'

'If you should be discovered—which is not at all likely—I promise you that, rather than give you back into papa's clutches, I will carry you straight off to Rooklands and marry you with a special licence. Will that satisfy you? Would you consent to be my wife, Rosa?'

'Yes!' she replied, and earnestly, for she had been captivated by the manner and appearance of Frederick Darley for some weeks past, and this was not the first meeting by many that they had held without the knowledge of her father.

'That's my own Damask Rose,' he exclaimed triumphantly; 'give me a kiss, dear, just one to seal the contract; there's no one looking!' He held up his face towards her as he spoke—his handsome *insouciant* face with its bright eyes and smile, and she stooped hers to meet it, and give the embrace he petitioned for.

But someone *was* looking. Almost as Rosa's lips met Darley's a frightened look came into her eyes, and she uttered a note of alarm.

'What is it, darling?'

'It's my brother George! He's coming this way. Oh! go, Mr Darley—pray go across the field and let me canter on to meet him.' He would have stayed to re-

monstrate, but the girl pushed him from her, and thinking discretion the better part of valour, he jumped over a neighbouring stile and walked away in the direction she had indicated, whilst she, with a considerable degree of agitation, rode on to make what excuses she best could for the encounter to her brother. George Murray was sauntering along the hedge-row switching the leaves off the hazel bushes as he went, and apparently quite unsuspicious of anything being wrong. But the first question he addressed to his sister went straight to the point.

'Who was that fellow that was talking to you just now, Rosa?'

She knew it would be of no use trying to deceive him, so she spoke the truth.

'It was Mr Darley!'

'What's he doing over here?'

'How should I know? You'd better ask him yourself! Am I accountable for Mr Darley's actions?'

'Don't talk nonsense. You know what I mean perfectly well. Did he come over to Rooklands to see you?'

'To see me—what will you get into your head next?'

'Well, you seemed to be hitting it off

pretty well together. What were you whispering to him about just now?'

'I didn't whisper to him.'

'You did! I saw you stoop your head to his ear. Now look here, Rosa! Don't you try any of your flirtation games on with Darley, or I'll go straight to the governor and tell him.'

'And what business is it of yours, pray?'

'It would be the business of every one of us. You don't suppose we're going to let you marry a gamekeeper, do you?'

'Really, George, you're too absurd. Cannot a girl stop to speak to a man in the road without being accused of wanting to marry him? You will say I want to marry every clodhopper I may dance with at the harvest-home to-night next.'

'That is a very different thing. The ploughboys are altogether beneath you, but this Darley is a kind of half-and-half fellow that might presume to imagine himself good enough to be a match for you.'

'Half-and-half indeed!' exclaimed Rosa, nettled at the reflection on her lover; 'and pray, what are *we* when all's said and done? Mr Darley's connections are as good as our own, and better, any day.'

'Halloa! what are you making a row about? I'll tell you what, Rosa. It

strikes me very forcibly you want to "carry on" with Lord Worcester's keeper, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for thinking of it. You—who have been educated and brought up in every respect like a lady—to condescend to flirt with an upstart like that, *a mere servant!* Why, he's no better than Isaac Barnes, or old Whisker, or any of the rest of them, only he's prig enough to oil his hair, and wear a button-hole, in order to catch the eye of such silly noodles like yourself.'

'You've no right to speak to me in this way, George. You know nothing at all about the matter.'

'I know that I found Darley and you in the lane with your heads very close together, and that directly he caught sight of me he made off. That doesn't look as if his intentions were honourable, does it? Now, look you here, Rosa. Is he coming to the barn to-night?'

'I believe so!'

'And who asked him?'

'I don't know,' she replied, evasively; 'papa, perhaps—or very likely Mr Darley thought he required no invitation to join a ploughman's dance and supper.'

'Well, you're not to dance with him if he does come.'

'I don't know what right you have to forbid it.'

'None at all! but if you won't give me the promise I shall go straight to the governor, and let him know what I saw to-day. *He's* seen something of it himself, I can tell you, and he told me to put you on your guard, so you can take your choice of having his anger or not.'

This statement was not altogether true, for if Farmer Murray *had* heard anything of his daughter's flirtation with the handsome gamekeeper, it had been only what his sons had suggested to him, and he did not believe their reports. But the boys, George and Robert, now young men of three or four-and-twenty, had had more than one consultation together on the subject, and quite made up their minds that their sister must not be allowed to marry Frederick Darley. For they were quite alive to the advantages that a good connection for her might afford to themselves, and wanted to see her raise the family instead of lowering it.

Rosa, however, believed her brother's word. Dread of her father's anger actuated in a great measure this belief, and she began to fear lest all communication between Darley and herself might be broken off if

she did not give the required promise. And the very existence of the fear opened her eyes to the truth, that her lover was become a necessary part of life's enjoyment to her. So, like a true woman and a hunted hare, she temporised and 'doubled.'

'Does papa really think I am too intimate with Mr Darley, George?' she inquired, trembling.

'Of course he does, like all the rest of us.'

'But it's a mistake. I don't care a pin about him.'

'Then it will be no privation for you to give up dancing with him to-night.'

'I never intended to dance with him.'

'Honour bright, Rosa?'

'Well, I can't say more than I have. However, you will see. I *shall not* dance with him. If he asks me, I shall say I am engaged to you.'

'You can say what you like, so long as you snub the brute. I wonder at his impudence coming up to our "Home" at all. But these snobs are never wanting in "cheek." However, if Bob and I don't give him a pretty broad hint to-night that his room is preferable to his company, I'm a duffer! Are you going in, Rosa?'

For the young people had continued to walk towards their own home, and had now arrived at the farm gates.

'Yes. I've been in the saddle since ten o'clock this morning, and have had enough of it.'

'Let me take Polly round to the stables before the governor sees the state you've brought her home in, then,' said George, as his sister dismounted and threw him the reins. He could be good-natured enough when he had his own way, and he thought he had got it now with Rosa. But she went up to her chamber bent but on one idea—how best to let Mr Darley know of what had passed between her brother and herself, that he might not be surprised at the caution of her behaviour when they met in the big barn.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile Lizzie Locke having left her basket of cockles at Mavis Farm, had reached her cottage home. Her thoughts had been very pleasant as she journeyed there and pondered on the coming pleasure of the evening. It was not often the poor child took any part in the few enjoyments to be met in Corston. People were apt to leave her out of their invitations, thinking that as she was blind she could not pos-

sibly derive any amusement from hearing, and she was of too shrinking and modest a nature to obtrude herself where she was not specially required. She had never been to one of the harvest-home suppers given by Farmer Murray (in whose employ her cousin Laurence worked), though she had heard much of their delights. But now that Miss Rosa had particularly desired her to come, she thought Larry would be pleased to take her. And she had a print dress nice and clean for the occasion, and her aunt would plait her hair neatly for her, and she should hear the sound of Larry's voice as he talked to his companions, and of his feet whilst he was dancing, and, perhaps, after supper one of his famous old English songs—songs which they had heard so seldom of late, and the music of which her aunt and she had missed so much.

It was past twelve o'clock as she entered the cottage, but she was so full of her grand news that she scarcely remembered that she must have kept both her relations waiting for their dinner of bacon and beans.

'Why, Lizzie, my girl, where on earth have you been to?' exclaimed her aunt, Mrs Barnes, as she appeared on the threshold. Mrs Barnes' late husband had been

brother to the very Isaac Barnes, once poacher, now gamekeeper on Farmer Murray's estate, and there were scandal-mongers in Corston ill-natured enough to assert that the taint was in the blood, and that young Laurence Barnes was very much inclined to go the same way as his uncle had done before him. But at present he was a helper in the stables of Mavis Farm.

'I've been along the marshes,' said Lizzie, 'gathering cockles, and they gave me sixpence for them up at the farm; and oh, aunt! I met Miss Rosa on my way back, and she says Larry must take me up to the big barn this evening to their harvest-home supper.'

Laurence Barnes was seated at his mother's table already occupied in the discussion of a huge lump of bread and bacon, but as the name of his master's daughter left Lizzie's lips it would have been very evident to any one on the look-out for it that he started and seemed uneasy.

'And what will you be doing at a dance and a supper, my poor girl?' said her aunt, but not unkindly. 'Come, Lizzie, sit down and take your dinner; that's of much more account to you than a harvest merry-making.'

'Not till Larry has promised to take me

up with him this evening,' replied the girl gaily, and without the least fear of a rebuff. 'You'll do it, Larry, won't you? for Miss Rosa said they'd all be there, and if she didn't see me she'd send round to the cottage after me. She said, 'Tell Larry I *insist* upon it; she did, indeed!'

'Well, then, I'm not going up myself, and so you can't go,' he answered roughly.

'*Not going yourself!*'

The exclamation left the lips of both women at once. They could not understand it, and it equally surprised them. Larry—the best singer and dancer for twenty miles round, to refuse to go up to his master's harvest-home! Why, what would the supper and the dance be without him? At least, so thought Mrs Barnes and Lizzie.

'Aren't you well, Larry?' demanded the blind girl, timidly.

'I'm well enough; but I don't choose to go. I don't care for such rubbish. Let 'em bide! They'll do well enough without us.'

Lizzie dropt into her seat in silence, and began in a mechanical way to eat her dinner. She was terribly disappointed, but she did not dream of disputing her cousin's decision. He was master in that house; and she would not have cared to

go to the barn without Larry. Half the pleasure would be gone with his absence. He did not seem to see that.

'Mother can take you up, Liz, if she has a mind to,' he said, presently.

'*I* take her along of me!' cried Mrs Barnes, 'when I haven't so much as a clean kerchief to pin across my shoulders. You're daft, Larry. I haven't been to such a thing as a dance since I laid your father in the churchyard, and if our Liz can't go without me she must stop at home.'

'I don't want to go, indeed I don't, not without Larry,' replied the blind girl, earnestly.

'And what more did Miss Rosa say to you?' demanded her aunt, inquisitively.

'We talked about the sands, aunt. She'd been galloping all over them this morning, and I told her how dangerous they were beyond Corston Point, and we was getting on so nice together, when some one came and interrupted us.'

'*Some one!* Who's some one?' said Laurence Barnes, quickly.

'I can't tell you; I never met him before.'

''Twas a man, then?'

'Oh yes! 'twas a man—a gentleman! I knew that, because there were no nails

in his boots, and he didn't give at the knees as he walked.'

'What more?' demanded Larry, with lowered brows.

'Miss Rosa knew him well, because they never named each other, but only wished "good morning." She said, "What are you doing here?" and he said, "Looking after you." He carried a rose in his hand or his coat, I think, for I smelt it, and a cane, too, for it struck the saddle flap.'

'Well, that's enough,' interrupted Laurence, fiercely.

'I thought you wanted to hear all about it, Larry?'

'Is there any more to tell, then?'

'Only that as they walked away together, Miss Rosa said she was so glad he was coming up to the harvest-home to-night.'

'So *he's* a-going, the cur!' muttered the young man between his teeth. '*I* know him, with his cane, and his swagger, and his stinking roses; and I'll be even with him yet, or my name's not Larry Barnes.'

It was evident that Mr Frederick Darley was no greater favourite in the cottage than the farm.

'Whoever are you talking of?' said Larry's mother. 'Do you know the gentleman Lizzie met with, Miss Rosa?'

'*Gentleman!* He's no gentleman. He's nothing but a common gamekeeper, same as uncle. But don't let us talk of him any more. It takes the flavour of the bacon clean out of my mouth.'

The rest of the simple meal was performed in silence, and then Mrs Barnes gathered up the crockery and carried it into an outer room to wash.

Larry and Lizzie were left alone. The girl seemed to understand that in some mysterious way she had offended her cousin, and wished to restore peace between them, so she crept up to where he was smoking his midday pipe on the old settle by the fire, and laid her head gently against his knees. They had been brought up from babes together, and were used to observe such innocent little familiarities towards each other.

'Never mind about the outing, Larry. I'm not a bit disappointed, and I'm sorry I said anything about it.'

'That's not true, Liz. You *are* disappointed, and it's my doing; but I couldn't help it. I didn't feel somehow as if I had the heart to go. But I've changed my mind since dinner, and we'll go up to the harvest-home together, my girl. Will that content you?'

'Oh, Larry! you *are* good!' she said, raising herself, her cheeks crimsoned with renewed expectation; 'but I'd rather stop at home a thousand times over than you should put yourself out of the way for me.'

A sudden thought seemed to strike the young man as he looked at Lizzie's fair, sightless face. He had lived with her so long, in a sisterly way, that it had never struck him to regard her in any other light. But something in the inflection of her voice as she addressed him, made him wonder if he were capable of making her happier than she had ever been yet. He cherished no other hopes capable of realisation. What if he could make his own troubles lighter by lightening those of poor Liz? Something of this sort, but in much rougher clothing, passed through his half-tutored mind. As it grasped the idea he turned hurriedly towards the girl kneeling at his knee.

'Do you really care about me, lass?' he said. 'Do you care if I'm vexed or not? Whether I come in or go out? If I like my dinner or I don't like it? Does all this nonsense worry you? Answer me, for I want to know.'

'Oh! Larry, what do you mean? Of

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course I care. I can't do much for you—more's the pity—without my poor eyes, but I can think of you and love you, Larry, and surely you know that I do both.'

'But would you like to love me more, Liz?'

'How could I love you more?'

'Would you like to have the *right* to care for me—the *right* to creep after me in your quiet way wherever I might happen to go—the *right* to walk alongside of me, with your hand in mine, up to the harvesting home to-night; eh, Liz?'

The girl half understood her cousin's meaning, but she was too modest not to fear she might be mistaken. Larry could never wish to take *her*, blind and helpless, for his *wife*.

'Larry, speak to me more plainly; I don't catch your meaning quite.'

'Will you marry me then, Liz, and live along of mother and me to the end of your life?'

'*Marry you!*—Be your *wife!*—*Me! Oh*, Larry, you can't mean it! never.'

'I do mean it,' replied her cousin with an oath; 'and I'll take you as soon as ever you'll take me if you will but say the word.'

'But I am *blind*, Larry.'

'Do you suppose I don't know that? Perhaps I likes you blind best.'

'But I am so useless. I get about so slowly. If anything was to happen to aunt, how could I keep the house clean and cook the dinners, Larry? You must think a bit more before you decide for good.'

But the poor child's face was burning with excitement the while, and her sightless eyes were thrown upwards to her cousin's face as though she would strain through the darkness to see it.

'If anything happened to mother, do you suppose I'd turn you out of doors, Liz? And in any case, then, I must have a wife or a servant to do the work—it will make no difference that way. The only question is, do you want me for a husband?'

'Oh! I have loved you ever so!' replied the girl, throwing herself into his arms. 'I couldn't love another man, Larry. I know your face as well as if I had seen it, and your step, and your voice. I can tell them long before another body knows there's sound a-coming.'

'Then you'll have me?'

'If you'll have *me*,' she murmured in a tone of delight as she nestled against his rough clothes.

'That's settled, then, and the sooner the banns are up the better! Here, mother! Come along and hear the news. Lizzie has promised to marry me, and I shall take her to church as soon as we've been cried.'

'Well! I *am* pleased,' said Mrs Barnes. 'You couldn't have got a neater wife, Larry, though her eyesight's terribly against her, poor thing! But I'm sure of one thing, Liz, if you can't do all for him that another woman might, you'll love my lad with the best among them, and that thought will make me lie quiet in my grave.'

The poor cannot afford the time to be as sentimental over such things as the rich. Larry kissed his cousin two or three times on the forehead in signification of the compact they had just entered into, and then he got up and shook himself, and prepared to go back to his afternoon work.

'That's a good job settled,' he thought as he did so; 'it will make Lizzie happy, and drive a deal of nonsense may be out of my head. But if ever I can pay out that scoundrel Darley I'll do it, if it costs me the last drop of my blood.'

The blind girl regarded what had passed between her cousin and herself with very different feelings. Condemned, by reason

of her infirmity, to pass much of her young life in solitude, the privation had repaid itself by giving her the time and opportunity for an amount of self-culture which, if subjected to the rough toil and rougher pleasures of her class, she never could have attained. Her ideas regarding the sanctity of love and marriage were very different from those of other Corston girls. She could never have 'kept company,' as they termed it, with one man this month and another the next. Her pure mind, which dwelt so much within itself, shrank from the levity and coarseness with which she had heard such subjects treated, and believing, as she had done, that she should never be married, she had pleased herself by building up an ideal of what a husband should be, and how his wife would love and reverence him. And this ideal had always had for its framework a fancied portrait of her cousin Laurence. In reality, this young fellow was an average specimen of a fresh-faced country youth, with plenty of colour and flesh and muscle. But to the blind girl's fancy he was perfection. Her little hands from babyhood had traced each feature of his face until she knew every line by heart, and though she had never acknowledged it even to herself, she

had been in love with him ever since she was capable of understanding the meaning of the term. So that although his proposal to marry her had come as a great surprise, it had also come as a great glory, and set her heart throbbing with the pleasant consciousness of returned affection.

She was in a flutter of triumph and delight all the afternoon, whilst Larry was attending to his horses, and hardly knew how to believe in her own happiness. Her aunt brushed and plaited her long hair for her till it was as glossy and neat as possible, and tied her new cherry-coloured ribbon round the girl's throat that she might not disgrace her son's choice at the merry-making. And then Lizzie sat down to wait for her affianced lover's return, the proudest maid in Corston. Larry came in punctually for his tea, and the first thing he did was to notice the improvement in his little cousin's appearance; and indeed joy had so beautified her countenance that she was a different creature from what she had been on the sands that morning. The apathy and indifference to life had disappeared, and a bright colour bloomed in her soft cheeks. As she tucked her hand through her cousin's arm, and they set off to walk together to Farmer Murray's har-

vest-home, Mrs Barnes looked after them with pride, and declared that if poor Liz had only got her sight they would have made the handsomest couple in the parish.

Larry was rather silent as they went up to the barn together, but Liz was not *exigeante*, and trotted by his side with an air of perfect content. When they arrived they found the place already full, but the 'quality' had not yet arrived, and until they did so, no one ventured to do more than converse quietly with his neighbour, although the fiddlers from Wells were all ready and only waiting a signal to strike up. But in those days the working men did not consider their festival complete without the presence of the master, and it would have been a sore affront if the members and guests of the household had not also joined them in order to open the ball and set the liquor flowing. In these days of Radicalism perhaps they find they can get on just as well without them. Larry still kept Lizzie's arm snugly tucked within his own as he described to her how beautiful the walls of the barn looked hung with flags and decorated with flowers and evergreens, and what a number of lamps there were, and what a lot of liquor and eatables were stowed away at the

further end. He was still talking to her rapidly, and, as she imagined, somewhat uneasily, when a cheer rose up from a group of rustics outside, and Larry gave a start that almost disengaged her from his clasp.

'What's the matter?' she demanded. 'Is it the gentry coming, Larry?'

'Yes! 'tis they, sure enough. Keep close to me, Liz—I don't want to part from you, not for one moment.'

'Oh, Larry! that do make me feel so happy,' she whispered. As she spoke, the party from Mavis Farm entered the barn and were received with a shout of welcome. Mr Murray, a fine, hale old gentleman, and his sons came first; then Miss Rosa, looking rather conscious, tripping after her brothers in a white muslin dress. The farmer advanced to the beer barrel, and having filled his glass, drank success to all present, and asked them to give three cheers for a bountiful harvest. When that ceremony was completed the fiddlers struck up a merry country dance, and every one was at liberty to drink and caper about. The young people from Mavis Farm all took part in the first dance, and Rosa Murray came up and asked Larry if he would be her partner on the occasion.

She ought in fairness to have opened the ball with her father's bailiff or one of the upper servants, but she preferred the young groom, with whom she held daily intercourse, and she was accustomed to go her own way without reference to anybody's feelings. As she approached the cousins she gave Lizzie a kindly welcome.

'I am so glad you have come up, Lizzie; and now your cousin must get you a nice seat until this dance is ended, for I intend him to open the ball with me.'

This was considered a great honour on the part of the villagers, and the blind girl coloured with pleasure to think that her *fiancé* had been selected for the ceremony.

'Oh, Miss Rosa, you *are* good! Larry, why don't you thank the young lady, and say how proud you shall be to dance alongside of her?'

But Larry said nothing. He reddened, it is true, but more from confusion than pleasure, and he was so long a time settling Lizzie to his satisfaction, that Rosa was disposed to be angry at his dilatoriness, and called out to him sharply that if he were not ready she should open the ball with some one else. Then he ran and took his place by her side, and went through the evolutions of 'down the

middle' and 'setting at the corners' with a burning face and a fast-beating heart. Poor Laurence Barnes! His young mistress's constant presence in the stables and familiarity with himself had been too much for his susceptible nature. She was to him, in the pride of her youthful loveliness and the passport it afforded her for smiling upon all classes of men, as an angel, rather than a woman, something set too high above for him ever to reach, but yet with the power to thrill his veins and make his hot blood run faster. The touch of her ungloved hand in the figures of the dance made him tremble, and the glance of her eyes sickened him, so that as soon as the terrible ordeal was concluded he made her an awkward salute, and rushed from her side to that of the beer barrel, to drown his excitement in drink. And it was just there that he had left Lizzie Locke.

'That was beautiful, Larry,' she exclaimed, with glowing cheeks. 'I could hear the sound of your feet and Miss Rosa's above all the others, even when you went to the further end of the barn. It must be lovely to be able to dance like that. But it has made you thirsty, Larry. That's the third glass, isn't it?'

'Yes, lass, it's made me thirsty. But

don't you keep counting my glasses all the evening, or I shall move your chair a bit further off.'

She laughed quietly, and he flung himself upon the ground and rested his arm upon her knee. He seemed to feel safer and more at peace when by Lizzie's side, and she was quite happy in the knowledge that he was there. The Mavis Farm party did not dance again after the ball had been opened, at least Miss Rosa did not. But she moved about the barn restlessly. Sometimes she was in, and sometimes she was out. She did not seem to know her own mind for two minutes together.

'Why is that fellow Darley skulking about here, Larry?' demanded Isaac Barnes of his nephew. 'I've seen his ugly face peeping into the barn a dozen times. Why don't he come in or stay out? I hate such half-and-half sneaking ways.'

Larry muttered an oath, and was about to make some reply, when George Murray came up to them.

'Is that Mr Darley I see hanging about the barn door, Isaac?' he inquired of their own keeper.

'That it be, Master George; and as I was just saying to Larry here, why not in or out? What need of dodging?

He don't want to catch no one here, I suppose?'

'He'd better try. I'd soon teach him who the barn belongs to.'

'And I'd back you, Master George,' cried Larry resolutely. The strong-brewed Norfolk ale was giving him a dash of Dutch courage.

'Would you, Larry? That's right! Well, I can't be in all parts of the barn at once, and father wants me to take the bottom of the supper-table, so you keep your eye on Mr Darley for me, will you? and if he looks up to anything, let me know.'

'I'm your man, Master George,' replied Larry heartily.

Rosa was near enough to them to overhear what had passed. Her brother had intended she should do so. But when he set his wit against that of a woman he reckoned without his host. Rosa had been on the look-out for Frederick Darley from the beginning of the evening, and during the first greeting, had managed to slip a little note into his hand, warning him of her brother's animosity, and begging him to keep as much as possible out of their sight until an opportunity occurred for her joining him in the apple copse.

Now, she felt afraid of what might happen if there were an encounter between the two young men, and decided at once that her best plan would be, as soon as she saw George safely disposed of at the supper-table, to tamper with his spy. And unfortunately Rosa Murray knew but too well how to accomplish this. Young Barnes' infatuation had not been unnoticed by her. She would have been aware of it if a cat had admired her. She knew his hand trembled when he took her foot to place her in the saddle, and that he became so nervous and agitated when she entered the stable as often to have to be recalled to a sense of his duty by a sharp rebuke from the head groom. She had known it all for months past, and it had pleased her. She was so vain and heartless that she thought nothing of what pain the poor fellow might be undergoing. She laughed at his presumption, and only considered it another feather in her cap. But now she saw her way to make use of it. The dancing had recommenced, and was proceeding with vigour, and the huge rounds of beef and legs of mutton on the supper-table were beginning to be served out. George was in full action, leading the onslaught with his carving-knife,

when Rosa Murray approached Laurence Barnes.

'Won't you dance again, nor go and have your supper, Larry dear?' Lizzie was asking, with a soft caress of her hand upon the head laid on her knee.

'I don't want to dance no more,' said Larry, 'and I sha'n't sup till the table's clearer and you can sup with me, Liz.'

'That's very good of you, Barnes,' said Rosa, who had caught the words; 'but if you'll take Lizzie to the table now, I'm sure George will find room for you both.'

'No thank you, miss,' he answered; 'I promised Master George to bide here till he came back, and I mustn't break my word.'

'Then I shall sit here with you, and we'll all have supper together by-and-by,' replied Rosa. 'Have you been gathering cockles again this afternoon, Lizzie.'

'Oh no, miss!' said Lizzie, blushing at the recollection of how her afternoon had been employed; 'it's high tide at four o'clock now, and I haven't been out of the house again to-day.'

'Did your cousin tell you how she scolded me for riding in the salt marshes, Barnes?'

'Well! it *is* dangerous, miss, for such as

don't know the place. I mind me when Whisker's grandfather strayed out there by himself—'

'Oh, Larry!' cried Lizzie, 'don't go to tell that terrible tale. It always turns me sick!'

'Is that what they call the Marsh Ghost, Barnes? Oh! I must know all about it. I love ghost stories, and I have never been able to hear the whole of this one. Where does it appear, and when?'

'Lizzie here can tell you better than me, miss—she knows the story right through.'

'It's a horrible tale, Miss Rosa. You'll never forget it, once heard.'

'That's just why I want to hear it; so, Lizzie, you must tell it me directly. Don't move, Barnes, you don't inconvenience me. I can sit up in this corner quite well.'

'Well, miss, if you *must* hear it,' began the blind girl, 'it happened now nigh upon twenty years ago. Whisker's grandfather, that used to keep the lodge at Rooklands, had grown so old and feeble the late lord pensioned him off and sent him home to his own people. He hadn't no son in Corston then, miss, because they was both working in the south, but his daughter-in-law, his first son's widdy, that had married Skewton the baker, she offered to take the

old man in and do for him. Lord Worcester allowed him fifty pounds a-year for life, and Mrs Skewton wanted to take it all for his keep, but the old man was too sharp for that, and he only gave her ten shillings a-week and put by the rest, no one knew where nor for what. Well, miss, this went on for three or four years may be, and then poor Whisker had grown very feeble and was a deal of trouble, and his sons didn't seem to be coming back, and the Skewtons had grown tired of him, so they neglected him shamefully. I shouldn't like to tell you, miss, all that's said of their beating the poor old man and starving him, and never giving him no comforts. At last he got quite silly and took to wandering about alone, and he used to go out on the marshes, high or low tide, without any sense of the danger, and everybody said he'd come to harm some day. And so he did, for one day they carried his body in from Corston Point quite dead, and all bruised with the rocks and stones. The Skewtons pretended as they knew nothing about how he'd come to his death, but they set up a cart just afterwards, and nothing has ever been heard of the old man's store of money, though his sons came back and inquired and searched far and near for it.

But about six months after—Larry! 'tisn't a fit tale for Miss Rosa to listen to!'

'Nonsense, Lizzie! I wouldn't have the ghost left out for anything. It's just that I want to hear of.'

'Well, miss, as I said, six months after old Whisker's death he began to walk again, and he's walked ever since.'

'Where does he walk?'

'Round and round Corston Point every full moon, wringing his hands and asking for his money. They say it's terrible to see him.'

'Have you ever seen him, Barnes?'

Larry coloured deeply and shook his head. The peasantry all over England are very susceptible to superstition, and the Corston folk were not behindhand in their fear of ghosts, hobgoblins, and apparitions of all sorts. This young fellow would have stood up in a fight with the best man there, but the idea of seeing a ghost made his blood curdle.

'Dear me, miss, no,' said Lizzie, answering for him, 'and I hope he never may. Why, it would kill him.'

'Nonsense, Lizzie. Barnes is not such a coward, I hope.'

Something in Miss Murray's tone made the blood leap to her retainer's face.

'I'm not a coward, miss,' he answered quickly.

'Of course not; I said so. But any man would be so who refused to go to Corston Point by night for fear of seeing old Whisker's ghost. He walks at full moon, you say! Why, he must be at it to-night, then! There never was a lovelier moon.'

'Don't, miss,' urged Lizzie, shivering.

'You silly goose! I don't want you to go. But, I must say, I should like to try the mettle of our friend here.'

'I beg your pardon, miss; did you mean that for me?' said Larry quickly.

'Yes, I did, Barnes. What harm? I should like to see some one who had really seen this ghost, and I'll give my gold watch chain to the man who will go to Corston Point to-night and bring me a bunch of the samphire that grows upon the top of it.'

Larry's mind was in a tumult. Some wild idea of rendering himself admirable in Rosa Murray's eyes may have influenced his decision—or the delight of possessing her watch chain may have urged him on to it Anyway, he rose up from the floor, and with chattering teeth, but a resolute heart, exclaimed,—

'I'll take you at your word, miss. I'll

go to Corston Point and bring you the samphire, and prove to you that Larry Barnes is not a coward.'

'Larry, Larry, you'll never do it!' cried Lizzie.

'Let me alone, my girl. I've made up my mind, and you won't turn it.'

'You *are* a brave fellow, Barnes,' said Rosa. 'I believe you're the only man in Corston that would have taken my wager. And, mind, it's a bargain. My gold watch chain for your bunch of samphire and news of old Whisker's ghost.' She was delighted at the idea of getting him out of the way.

'But, Larry! Miss Rosa! Think of the danger,' implored poor Lizzie. 'Oh, he'll never come back; I know he'll never come back.'

'What are you afraid of, Lizzie? Doesn't Barnes know the sands as well as you do? And the moonlight is as bright as day. It's silly to try and stop him.'

'But he's going to be my husband, miss,' whispered Lizzie, weeping, into Miss Murray's ear.

'Oh! if that's the case, perhaps he'd better follow your wishes,' rejoined Rosa coldly. 'Mine are of no consequence, of course, though I'd have liked Barnes to

wear my chain—we've been such good company together, haven't we, Larry?'

Her smile, and the way in which she spoke his name, determined him. He had heard the whispered conversation between her and Lizzie, and he felt vexed—he didn't know why—that it should have occurred.

'Be quiet, Liz,' he said, authoritatively. 'What's to be has nothing to do with this. I'm only too glad to oblige Miss Rosa, even with a bit of samphire. Good-bye, my girl, and good-bye, miss; it's close upon the stroke of ten, so you mayn't see me again till to-morrow morning; but when you do, it'll be *with the bunch of samphire in my hand!*'

He darted away from them as he spoke, and left the barn; whilst Lizzie Locke, disappointed at his departure, and frightened for his safety, wept bitterly. But the noise around them was so great, and everyone was so much occupied with his or her own pleasure, that little notice was taken of the girl's emotion.

'Come, Lizzie, don't be foolish,' urged Miss Murray, in a whisper, afraid lest the errand on which she had sent Larry should become public property. 'Your lover will be back in an hour, at the latest.'

'He'll never come back, miss! You've sent him to his death; I feel sure of it,' replied Lizzie, sobbing.

'This is too ridiculous,' said Rosa. 'If you intend to make such a fool of yourself as this, Lizzie, I think you had much better go home to your aunt. Shall I send Jane Williams back with you? You know her; she's a kind girl, and she'll lead you as safely as Larry would.'

'No; thank you, miss; Larry said he would return to the barn with your samphire, and I must wait here till he comes —if ever he comes,' she added mournfully.

'Well, you've quite upset me with all this nonsense, and I must have a breath of fresh air. If Master George, or papa, should ask for me, Lizzie, say I've got a headache, and gone home for a little while. I'll be round again before Larry's back; but if anything should keep me, tell him he shall have the chain to-morrow morning. For he's a brave fellow, Lizzie, and whether he sees the ghost or not, he shall keep my watch chain as a wedding present.'

She patted the blind girl's hand before she tripped away; but no amount of encouragement could have driven the conviction from Lizzie Locke's breast that her

lover was a doomed man; and added to this, she had an uncomfortable feeling in her heart (though too undefined to be called jealousy), that his alacrity in complying with his young mistress's request arose from something more than a desire to maintain his character for courage in her eyes. So the poor child sat by the beer barrel, sad and silent, with her face buried in her hands; and so she remained till midnight had sounded from the church clock, and the lights were put out, and the festivities concluded, and some kind neighbour led her back to her aunt's house. But neither Miss Rosa nor Larry had returned.

. . . . . .

Miss Rosa's 'breath of fresh air' meant, of course, her appointment with Frederick Darley in the apple copse. She had got Larry nicely out of the way (notwithstanding the fears of his betrothed), and there was no obstacle in her path as she left the barn and approached the place of meeting. She had taken the precaution to wrap a large dark shawl round her white dress, and, thus concealed, crept softly down the lane and through the lower meadow unobservant or unheeding that her father's terrier, Trim, had followed her footsteps.

Mr Darley was in waiting for her, and a lover-like colloquy ensued. He did not again mention the subject of marriage, at which Rosa was somewhat disappointed; for she believed that, notwithstanding her brother's assertions to the contrary, Mr Murray might not refuse his consent to her becoming Frederick Darley's wife; and he certainly was the handsomest man round about, Lord Worcester himself not excepted. But in the midst of their tender conversation, as Darley was telling Rosa he loved her better than ever man had loved woman in this world before, Trim commenced wagging his tail and snuffing the grass.

'What is the matter?' cried Rosa in alarm. 'Down, Trim, down—be quiet, sir! Oh, Frederick! surely no one can be coming this way.'

'Don't be afraid,' said her companion; 'throw your shawl over your head and trust to me. I will answer for it that no one shall molest you whilst under my protection.'

But he had not calculated upon having to make his words good in the presence of her father and brother.

Trim would *not* lie down, nor be quiet, but kept on with his little signals of warning, until two dark figures could be dis-

cerned making their way towards them over the grass, when he bounded away to meet them. Rosa guessed who the newcomers must be, and her heart died within her for fear. She would have screamed, but Darley placed his hand before her mouth. There was no escape for the lovers, even if an attempt to escape would not have increased suspicion, for the apple copse was a three-cornered field that had but the one entrance through which they had come. In another moment the four had met, and Rosa recognised her father and her brother George. How they had guessed they would find her there she did not stay to ask or even think. All her thought was how to shield herself from the farmer's anger. The fact was that George had wished to seat his sister at the supper-table, when, finding that she and Darley and Larry had all three mysteriously disappeared, he had communicated his suspicions and the events of the morning to his father, and they had sallied forth together in search of the missing daughter, and were on their way to the farm, where they had been told she had gone, when Trim's unwarrantable interference led them to the very spot.

Mr Murray's rage was unbounded. He

did not wait for any explanations, but walked up straight to Rosa and demanded,—

'Is this my daughter?'

The girl was too frightened to speak as she clung to her lover's arm, but Darley, perceiving that an amicable settlement was out of the question, replied in the same tone,—

'What right have you to ask, sir?'

'The right of a father, Mr Darley, who has no intention to let disgrace be brought into his family by such as you.'

He pulled Rosa by the arm roughly as he spoke, and dragged the shawl from her face.

'So it is you, you jade; and you would try and deceive your father, who has never refused you a thing in his life. That's the gratitude of women. However, you'll pay for it. You've had your first clandestine meeting and your last. No more gamekeeper's courtships for you if I know it.'

'By what right, Mr Murray, do you insult me, or this young lady, in my presence? If I have persuaded her to do a foolish thing, I am sorry for it, but you cannot give a harsher name to a lover's moonlight walk.'

'I do give it a harsher name, sir, and

you know it deserves it. A lover's moonlight walk indeed! You mean a scoundrel's endeavour to get an innocent girl into his clutches.'

'Papa! papa! you are quite mistaken. Mr Darley has asked me to marry him. He will marry me to-morrow by special licence if you will only give your consent.'

'Marry you to-morrow! you poor fool! You've been swallowing every lie he chose to tell you. He can't marry you to-morrow nor any day, and for a good reason. *He's a married man already.*'

Rosa screamed, George uttered an oath, and Darley darted forward.

'Who told you so, Mr Murray?'

'Never mind who told me; you know it is true. Can you deny that you left a wife down south when you came to Rooklands? Lord Worcester does not know it, perhaps, but there are those who do.'

'Who is your informant?' repeated Darley.

'I shall not tell you; but if you don't clear out of my meadow and Corston within half-an-hour, and promise never to show your face here again, I'll lay the whole story before his lordship.'

'Are you going, or shall I kick you out?' inquired George.

Frederick Darley thought upon the whole he'd better go. He turned on his heel with an oath, and slunk out of the apple copse like a beaten cur.

'Come, my girl,' said Farmer Murray, not unkindly, as he commenced to walk homeward, with his hand still on Rosa's arm; 'you've been a fool, but I hope you've been nothing worse. Never see nor speak to the man again, and I'll forgive you.'

'Oh, papa! is it really true?' she answered, sobbing.

'It's as true as Heaven, Rosa! It was Larry Barnes told it me a week ago, and he had it from one of the Whiskers, who worked near Lord Worcester's estate in Devon, and knew Mrs Frederick Darley by sight. You've had a narrow escape, my girl, and you may thank Larry for it.'

'Poor Larry!' sighed Rosa; and if she could have known what was happening to poor Larry at that moment, she would have sighed still deeper. He had accepted her wager, and rushed off at her bidding to get the bunch of samphire that grew at the top of Corston Point. His brain was rather staggered at the idea of what he had undertaken, but he had

been plentifully plied with Farmer Murray's "Old October," and it was a bright, moonlight night, so that he did not find the expedition after all so terrible as he had imagined. The salt marshes were very lonely, it is true, and more than once Larry turned his head fearfully over his shoulder, to find that nothing worse followed him than his own shadow; but he reached the Point in safety, and secured the samphire, without having encountered old Whisker's ghost. Then his spirits rose again, and he whistled as he commenced to retrace his steps to the village. He knew he had been longer over the transaction than he had expected, and that he should be unable to see Miss Rosa that night; but he intended to be up at the farm the very first thing in the morning, and give the bunch of samphire into her own hands. He did not expect to receive the watch chain; he had not seen the ghost, and had not earned it; but Larry's heart was all the lighter for that. He would not have exchanged a view of the dreaded spectre even for the coveted gold chain that had hung so long round the fair neck of his divinity. But as he turned Corston Point again, he started back to see a figure

before him. The first moment he thought it must be old Whisker's ghost, but the next convinced him of his error. It was only Mr Darley—Lord Worcester's game-keeper! He had been so absorbed in angry and remorseful thought since he left the apple copse that he had unwittingly taken the wrong turning, and now found himself upon the wide, desolate waste of the salt marshes, and rather uncertain on which side to find the beaten track again which led to the road to Rooklands. The two men were equally surprised and disgusted at encountering one another.

'What are you doing here?' demanded Darley, insolently.

'What business is that of yours?' replied the other. 'The salt marshes belong to me, I suppose, as much as they do to you.'

'You're not likely to have business here at this time of night. You've been dogging my footsteps,' said Darley, without the least consideration for probability.

'Follow *you!*' exclaimed Larry, with a big oath; 'it would be a long time before I'd take the trouble to care what happened to you. And since you ask my business

here, pray what may yours be? You didn't think to find Farmer Murray's daughter in the marshes at twelve o'clock at night, did you?'

'You insolent hound! how dare you take that young lady's name upon your lips in my presence?'

'I've as good a right to name her as you have—perhaps better. It was at her bidding I came here to-night. Did she send you here, too?'

'I shall not condescend to answer your question nor to link our names together. Do you know what you are?'

'I know what *you* are, Mr Darley, and that's a villain!'

Poor Larry had said he would have it out with him, and he thought his time had come. A sudden thought flashed through Darley's brain that here was the informer who had stopped his little game with the farmer's pretty daughter.

'Are you the man,' he demanded fiercely, 'who has thought fit to inform Mr Murray of my antecendents?'

'Antecedents' was a long word for Larry's comprehension, but he grasped the meaning somehow.

'If you'd say, am I the man who told the master that you have got a wife and

children down in Devonshire, I answer "Yes;" and I hope he's told you of it, and kicked you out of the barn to-night for a scoundrel, as you are, to try and make love to his daughter.'

'You brute!' cried Darley, throwing off his coat; 'I'll be revenged on you for this if there's any strength left in my arm.'

'All right,' replied the young countryman; 'I've longed to punch your head many and many a day. I'm glad it's come at last. There's plenty of room for us to have it out here, and the devil take the hindmost.'

He flew at his adversary as he spoke, and fastened his hands on to his coat-collar. Larry was the younger and the stronger built man of the two; but Frederick Darley had had the advantage of a politer education, in which the use of his fists was included, so that after a very little while it would have been evident to any bystander that Barnes was getting the worst of it. He had energy and muscle and right on his side, but his antagonist, unfortunately, possessed the skill, and after he had stood on the defensive four or five times, he seized his opportunity, and with a dexterous twist threw Larry heavily from him on the

ground. The young man fell backward, crashing his skull against a projecting fragment of rock, and then lay there, bleeding and unconscious. Darley glanced around him—not a creature was in sight. The broad harvest moon looked down placidly upon the deed of blood he had just committed, but human eyes to see it there were none. Finding that Barnes neither stirred nor groaned, he stooped down after a while, and laid his hand upon his heart. It had stopped beating. The body was getting cold. The man was dead!

Darley had not intended this, and it alarmed him terribly. His first idea was what he should do to secure his own safety. If he left the body there, would it be discovered, and the guilt traced home to him, or would the in-coming tide carry it out to sea, and wash it up again, weeks hence perhaps, as a drowned corpse upon the shore? He thought it might. He hoped it would. He remembered Larry's words, that Miss Rosa had sent him there that night. It was known, then, that he had gone to the marshes, and the fact was favourable.

He dragged the corpse a little way upon the sands that it might the sooner

be covered by the water; but finding it left deep traces of its progress, he lifted it with some difficulty upon his shoulders, and after carrying it perhaps a couple of dozen yards towards the sea, flung it with all his force before him. What was his amazement at seeing the body immediately sink in what appeared to be the solid ground, and disappear from view? Was it magic, or did his senses deceive him? Darley rubbed his eyes once or twice, but the miracle remained the same. The sand, with its smooth, shining surface, was before him, but the corpse of Larry Barnes had vanished. With a feeling of the keenest relief—such relief as the cowardly murderer who has cheated the gallows must experience—the gamekeeper settled his clothes, glanced once or twice fearfully around him, and then, retracing his steps, ran until he had gained the high road to Rooklands. But retribution dogged his murderous feet, and he was destined never to reach his master's home. When the morning dawned upon Corston, a fearful tale was going the round of its cottages. The dead body of Lord Worcester's gamekeeper had been found on the borders of the estate, shot through the heart, as it was supposed, in an encounter with

poachers, as traces of a fierce struggle were plainly visible around him.

And Laurence Barnes was missing!

The two circumstances put together seemed to provide a solution of the mystery. Everyone in Corston knew that poor Larry had not been entirely free from the suspicion of poaching, and most people had heard him abuse Frederick Darley, and vow to have vengeance upon him. What more likely, then, that Larry, having been taken at his old tricks, had discharged his rusty gun at the gamekeeper, and sent him out of the world to answer for all his errors. This was the light by which Corston folk read the undiscovered tragedy. All, that is to say, but two, and those two were the dead man's mother and his betrothed, who knew of his visit to the Point, and fully believed that old Whisker had carried him off.

The murder of Frederick Darley made quite a sensation in Corston. Lord Worcester gave his late gamekeeper a handsome funeral, and monument in the churchyard; and Rosa Murray lost her spirits and her looks, and wore a black ribbon on her bonnet for three months, although she dared not let her father know the reason why. But Darley had been so

generally disliked that, when the first horror at his death had subsided, people began to think he was a very good riddance, and though Rosa still looked grave if anyone mentioned his name, there was a certain young farmer who rode over from Wells to see her every Sunday, on whom the gossips said she seemed to look with considerable favour. And so, in due course of time, the name of Darley appeared likely to become altogether forgotten.

But not so Larry Barnes. Larry was a native of Corston, and had been a general favourite there, and his mother still lived amongst them to keep his memory green. No one in the village thought Larry was dead, except Lizzie and Mrs Barnes. The rustics believed that, finding he had shot Darley, he had become alarmed and ran away—left the country, perhaps, in one of the numerous fishing smacks that infest the coast, and gone to make his fortune in the 'Amerikys.' Larry would come back some day—they were assured of that—when the present lord was dead and gone, perhaps, and the whole affair was forgotten; but they were certain he was alive, simply because they were. But Lizzie Locke knew otherwise — Lizzie Locke, to whom a glimpse of heaven had

been opened the day of his death, and to whom the outer life must be as dark as the inner henceforward. She mourned for Larry far more than his mother did. Mrs Barnes had lived the best part of her life, and her joys and her sorrows were well-nigh over, but the poor blind girl had only waked up to a consciousness of what life might hold for her on the awful day on which hope seemed blotted out for ever. From the moment her cousin left the barn at Rosa's bidding, Lizzie drooped like a faded flower. That he never returned from that fatal quest was no surprise to her. She had known that he would never return. She had waited where he had left her till all the merry-making was over, and then she had gone home to her aunt, meek, unrepining, but certain of her doom. She had never been much of a talker, but she seldom opened her mouth, except it was absolutely necessary, after that day. But she would take her basket whenever the tide was low, and walk down to Corston Point and sit there—sometimes gathering cockles, but oftener talking to the dead, and telling him how much she had loved him. The few who had occasionally overheard her soliloquies said they were uncanny, and that Lizzie Locke

was losing her wits as well as her eyes. But the blind girl never altered her course. Corston Point became her home, and whenever it was uncovered by the tide, she might be seen sitting there beside her cockle basket, waiting for—she knew not what, talking to—she knew not whom.

. . . . . .

The autumn had passed, and the winter tides had set in. Rosa Murray never rode upon the Corston marshes now—she was more pleasantly engaged traversing the leafless lanes with the young farmer from Wells. Most people would have thought the fireside a better place to mourn one's dead by than out on the bleak marsh ; yet Lizzie Locke, despite her cotton clothing and bare head, still took her way there every morning, her patient, sightless eyes refusing to reveal the depths of sorrow that lay beneath them. One day, however, Mrs Barnes felt disposed to be impatient with the girl. She had left the house at eight o'clock in the morning and had not returned home since, and now it was dark, and the neighbours began to say it was not safe that Lizzie should remain out alone on such a bitter night, and that her aunt should enforce her authority to prevent such lengthy rambles. Two or three

of the men went out with lanterns to try and find her, but returned unsuccessful, and they supposed she must have taken shelter at some friend's house for the night. Lizzie Locke knew the marshes well, they said (no one in Corston better), and would never be so foolish as to tempt Providence by traversing them in the dark, for the currents were at their worst now, and the quicksands were shifting daily. The logs and spars of a ruined wreck of a year before had all come to the surface again within a few days, and with them a keg of pork, preserved by the saline properties of the ground in which it had been treasured, so that its contents were as fresh as though they had been found yesterday. Inquiries were made for the blind girl throughout the village, but no one had seen anything of her, and all that her friends could do was to search for her the first thing in the morning, when a large party set out for Corston Point, Mrs Barnes amongst them. Their faces were sad, for they had little hope that the cruel tide had not crawled over the watching girl before she was aware of it, and carried her out to sea. But as they neared the Point they discovered something still crouched upon the sand.

'It can't be Lizzie,' said the men, drawing closer to each other, though a bright, cold sun was shining over the February morning. 'It can't be nothing mortal, sitting there in the frost, with the icy waves lapping over its feet.'

But Mrs Barnes, who had rushed forward, waved her arms wildly, and called to them,—

'*It's him!* It's my Larry, washed up again by the sands; and poor Lizzie has found him out by the touch of her finger.'

The men ran up to the spot, and looked upon the sight before them. The corpse of Larry Barnes, with not so much as a feature changed by the hand of Time—with all his clothes intact and whole, and a bunch of samphire in his breast—lay out upon the shining sands, stiff as marble, but without any trace of decomposition upon his fresh young features and stalwart limbs.* And beside him, with her cheek bowed down upon his own, knelt Lizzie Locke. Lizzie, who had braved the winter's frost, and withstood the cold of a February night, in order to watch beside the recovered body of her lover.

* This is a fact, the corpse of a fisherman having been preserved in like manner for some nine months when buried in the salt marshes of Norfolk.

'Lizzie!' exclaimed Mrs Barnes. 'Look up now; I've come to comfort thee! Let us thank Heaven that he's found again, and the evil words they spoke of him must be took back.'

But the blind girl neither spoke nor stirred.

'Can't thee answer, my lass?' said Isaac the poacher, as he shook her by the arm.

The answer that she made was by falling backwards and disclosing her fair, gentle face—white and rigid as her lover's.

'Merciful God! she is dead!' they cried.

Yes, they were right. She was dead—she was at rest. What she had waited for she had found. What she had striven for she had gained. How many of us can say the same? Larry had been restored to her. The shifting quicksand had thrown him upon earth again, and had she not been there, his body might have been washed out to sea, and no further knowledge gained of his fate. But she had saved his dust for consecrated ground—more, she had saved his character for the healing of his mother's heart. For in his breast there still reposed the bunch of samphire he had perilled his life to gather

for the farmer's daughter, and, grasped tight in his hand, they found the neckcloth of Lord Worcester's gamekeeper—a crimson, silk neckcloth, recognised by all three —and which Larry had seized and held in the last deadly struggle. And the men of Corston looked on it and knew the truth —that their comrade was no murderer, but had fallen where he was found in a quarrel (probably pre-arranged) with Frederick Darley; and they cursed the gamekeeper in their hearts.

But Lizzie was at rest—happy Lizzie Locke! sleeping in the quiet churchyard at Corston, with her cheek pillowed on her Larry's breast.

THE END.

THE INVISIBLE TENANTS OF RUSHMERE.

'ON the banks of the Wye, Monmouthshire.—To be Let, furnished, a commodious Family Mansion, surrounded with park-like grounds. Stabling and every convenience. Only two and a-half miles from station, church, and post-office. Excellent fishing to be procured in the neighbourhood. Rent nominal to a responsible tenant.'

Such, with a few trifling additions, was the advertisement that caught my eye in the spring of 18—.

'My dear Jane,' I said, as I handed the paper over to my wife, 'this, I think, is the very thing we want.'

I was a London practitioner, with a numerous family and a large circle of patients; but the two facts, though blessings in themselves, were not without their disadvantages.

The hostages which I had given to fortune had made that strenuous action which attention to my numerous patients supplied incumbent on me; but the consequent anxiety and want of rest had drawn so largely on my mental and physical resources, that there was no need for my professional brethren to warn me of the necessity of change and country air. I felt myself that I was breaking down, and had already made arrangements with a friend to take my practice for a few months, and set me at liberty to attend to my own health. And being passionately fond of fishing, and all country pleasures and pursuits, and looking forward with zest to a period of complete quiet, the residence alluded to (if it fulfilled the promise of its advertisement) appeared to be all that I could desire.

'Park-like grounds!' exclaimed my wife, with animation. 'How the dear children will enjoy themselves.'

'And two and a-half miles from church or station,' I responded eagerly. 'No

neighbours, excellent fishing, and at a nominal rent. It sounds too good to be true.'

'Oh, Arthur! you must write, and obtain all the particulars this very day. If you put it off, some one will be sure to take the house before we have time to do so.'

'I shall go and see the city agents at once,' I replied, resolutely. 'It is too rare an opportunity to be lost. Only, don't raise your hopes too high, my dear. Advertisements are apt to be deceptive.'

But when I had seen Messrs Quibble & Lye on the subject, it really seemed as though for once they had spoken the truth. Rushmere, the house in question, had been built and furnished for his own use by an old gentleman, who died shortly afterwards, and his heirs, not liking the situation, had placed the property in the agents' hands for letting. The owners were wealthy, cared little for money, and had authorised the agents to let the house on any reasonable terms, and it was really a bargain to anyone that wanted it. They frankly admitted that the loneliness of the position of Rushmere was the reason of its cheapness; but when I heard the rent at which they offered to let me take it, if approved of, for three months, I was quite

ready to agree with Messrs Quibble & Lye in their idea of a bargain, and that, for those who liked solitude, Rushmere offered extraordinary advantages.

Armed with the necessary authority, I found my way down into Monmouthshire, to inspect the premises on the following day; and when I saw Rushmere, I felt still more disposed to be surprised at the opportunity afforded me, and to congratulate myself on the promptitude with which I had embraced it. I found it to be a good-sized country house, comfortably furnished, and, to all appearance, well built, standing in enclosed grounds, and on a healthy elevation; but, notwithstanding its isolated situation, I was too much a man of the world to believe, under the circumstances, that its greatest disadvantage lay in that fact. Accordingly, I peered eagerly about for damp walls, covered cesspools, unsteady joists, or tottering foundations, but I could find none.

'The chimneys smoke, I suppose?' I remarked, in a would-be careless tone, to the old woman whom I found in charge of the house, and who crept after me wherever I went.

'Chimbleys smoke, sir? Not as I knows of.'

'The roof leaks, perhaps?'

'Deary me, no. You won't find a spot of damp, look where you may.'

'Then there's been a fever, or some infectious disorder in the house?'

'A fever, sir? Why, the place has been empty these six months. The last tenants left at Christmas.'

'Empty for six months!' I exclaimed. 'How long is it, then, since the gentleman who built it died?'

'Old Mr Bennett, sir? He's been dead a matter of fifteen years or more.'

'Indeed! Then why don't the owners of the place sell it, instead of letting it stand vacant?' thought I to myself.

But I did not say so to the old woman, who was looking up in my face, as though anxious to learn what my decision would be.

'No vermin, I hope?' I suggested, as a last resource. 'You are not troubled with rats or mice at night, are you?'

'Oh, I don't sleep here at night, sir, thank heaven!' she answered in a manner which appeared to me unnecessarily energetic. 'I am only employed by day to air the house, and show it to strangers. I go home to my own people at night.'

'And where do your people live?'

'Better than half a mile from here, sir, and ours is the nearest cottage to Rushmere.'

And then—apprehensive, perhaps, that her information might prove a drawback to the letting of the property—she added, quickly,—

'Not but what it's a nice place to live in, is Rushmere, and very convenient, though a bit lonesome.'

I perfectly agreed with her, the 'lonesomeness' of the situation proving no detraction in my eyes.

On my return to London I gave my wife so glowing a description of the house and its surroundings, that she urged me to conclude the bargain at once; and, in the course of a few weeks, I and my family were transplanted from the purlieus of Bayswater to the banks of the Wye. It was the middle of May when we took possession, and the country wore its most attractive garb. The children were wild with delight at being let loose in the flower-bespangled fields, and, as I watched the tributaries of the river, and perceived the excellent sport they promised me, I felt scarcely less excited than the children. Only my wife, I thought, became inoculated with some of the absurd fears of the

domestics we had brought with us from town, and seemed to consider the locality more lonely and unprotected than she had expected to find it.

'It's a charming place, Arthur,' she acknowledged, 'and marvellously cheap; but it is certainly a long way from other houses. I find we shall have to send for everything to the town. Not even the country carts, with butter and poultry, seem to call at Rushmere.'

'My dear Jane, I told you distinctly that it was two and a-half miles from church or station, and you read it for yourself in the paper. But I thought we looked out for a retreat where we should run no risk of being intruded on by strangers.'

'Oh yes, of course; only there are not even any farmhouses or cottages near Rushmere, you see; and it would be so very easy for anyone to break in at night, and rob us.'

'Pooh, nonsense! What will you be afraid of next? The locks and bolts are perfectly secure, and both Dawson and I have firearms, and are ready to use them. Your fears are childish, Janie.'

But all my arguments were unavailing, and each day my wife grew more nervous, and less willing to be left alone. So much

so, indeed, that I made a practice of seeing that the house fastenings were properly secured each night myself, and of keeping a loaded revolver close to my hand, in case of need. But it damped my pleasure to find that Jane was not enjoying herself; and the country looked less beautiful to me than it had done at first. One night I suddenly awoke, to find that she was sitting up in bed, and in an attitude of expectation.

'My dear, what is the matter with you?'

'Oh, hush! I am sure that I hear footsteps on the stairs—footsteps creeping up and down.'

I listened with her, but could detect no sound whatever.

'Lie down again, Jane—it is only your imagination. Every one is fast asleep in bed.'

'I assure you, Arthur, I am not mistaken. Once they came quite near the door.'

'If so, it can only be one of the servants. You don't wish me to get up and encounter Mary or Susan in her night-dress, do you? Consider my morals!'

'Oh no, of course not,' she replied with a faint smile; yet it was some time before she fell to sleep again.

It was not many nights before my wife roused me again with the same complaint.

'Arthur, don't call me silly, but I am *certain* I heard something.'

To appease her fears, I shook off my drowsiness, and, with a lighted candle, made a tour of the house; but all was as I had left it.

Once, indeed, I imagined that I heard at my side the sound of a quick breathing; but that I knew must be sheer fancy, since I was alone.

The only circumstance that startled me was finding Dawson, the man servant, who slept on the ground floor, also awake, and listening at his door.

'What roused you, Dawson?'

'Well, sir, I can hardly say; but I fancied I heard some one going up the stairs a little while ago.'

'You heard me coming down, you mean.'

'No, sir, begging your pardon, it was footsteps going up—lighter than yours, sir. More like those of a woman.'

Yet, though I privately interrogated the female servants on the following day, I could not discover that any of them had been out of their beds; and I forbore to tell my wife what Dawson had said in corroboration of her statement.

Only I was as much annoyed as astonished when, as I finished my catechism of Mary, our head nurse, she informed me that she had made up her mind to leave our service. Mary—my wife's right hand—who had been with us ever since the birth of our first child! The announcement took me completely aback.

'What on earth is your reason for leaving us?' I demanded angrily; for I knew what a blow her decision would be to Jane. 'What have you to find fault with?'

'Nothing with you or the mistress, sir; but I can't remain in this house. I wouldn't stay in it a night longer, if it were possible to get away; and I do hope you and Mrs Delamere will let me go as soon as ever you can, sir, as it will be the death of me.'

'What will be the death of you?'

'The footsteps, sir, and the voices,' she answered, crying. 'I can hear them about the nurseries all night long, and it's more than any mortal can stand—it is, indeed.'

'Are you infected with the same folly?' I exclaimed. 'I see what it is, Dawson has been talking to you. I didn't know I had such a couple of fools in my establishment.'

'Mr Dawson has said nothing to me about nothing, sir,' she answered. 'I

hear what I hear with my own ears; and I wouldn't stay a week longer in this 'aunted place, not if you was to strew the floor with golden guineas for me.'

Not possessing either the capability or the inclination to test Mary's fidelity by the means she alluded to, and finding her determination unalterable, I gave her the desired permission to depart; only making it a stipulation that she should not tell her mistress the real reason for her leaving us, but ascribe it to bad news from home, or any other cause.

But though I could not but believe that the woman's idiotic terrors had blinded her judgment, I was extremely surprised to find she should have been so led astray, as I had always considered Mary to possess a remarkably clear head and good moral sense. The wailing and lamentation, from both mother and children, at the announcement of her departure made me still more angry with her obstinacy and folly. But she continued resolute; and we were driven to try and secure some one to fulfil her duties from the neighbouring town. But here a strange difficulty met us. We saw several fresh, rosy-cheeked maidens, who appeared quite willing to undertake our service, until they heard where we resided,

when, by an extraordinary coincidence, one and all discovered that some insurmountable obstacle prevented their coming at all. When the same thing had occurred several times in succession, and Jane appeared worn out with disappointment and fatigue, the landlord of the inn where we had put up for the day appeared at the door, and beckoned me out.

'May I make bold enough to ask if you want a servant to go to Rushmere?' he inquired of me in a whisper.

'Certainly, we do. Our nurse has been obliged to leave us suddenly, and we want some one to supply her place.'

'Then you may give it up as a bad job, sir; for you'll never get one of the country people here about to set a foot in Rushmere—not if you were to live there till the day of your death.'

'And why not?' I demanded, with affected ignorance.

'What! haven't you heard nothing since you've been there, sir?'

'Heard? What should I have heard, except the ordinary noises of the household?'

'Well, you're lucky if you've escaped so far,' returned the landlord, mysteriously; 'but it ain't for long. No one who lives

in Rushmere lives there *alone.* I can tell you the whole story if you like?'

'I have no desire to listen to any such folly,' I replied, testily. 'I am not superstitious, and do not believe in supernatural sights or sounds. If the people round about here are foolish enough to do so, I cannot help it; but I will not have the minds of my wife or family imbued with their nonsense.'

'Very good, sir; I hope you may be able to say as much two months hence,' said the man, civilly.

And so we parted.

I returned to Janie, and persuaded her he had told me that all the girls of that town had a strong objection to leave it, which was the reason they refused to take service in the country. I reminded her that Susan was quite competent to take charge of the whole flock until we returned to London; and it would be better after all to put up with a little inconvenience than to introduce a stranger to the nursery. So my wife, who was disappointed with the failure of her enterprise, fell in with my ideas, and we returned to Rushmere, determined to do as best we could with Susan only.

But I could not forget the landlord's earnestness, and, notwithstanding my in-

credulity, began to wish we were well out of Rushmere.

For a few days after Mary's departure we slept in peace; but then the question of the mysterious footsteps assumed a graver aspect, for my wife and I were roused from deep slumber one night by a loud knock upon the bedroom door, and springing up to answer it, I encountered, on the threshold, Dawson, pale with fright, and trembling in every limb.

'What do you mean by alarming your mistress in this way?' I inquired, angrily.

'I'm very sorry, sir,' he replied, with chattering teeth, 'but I thought it my duty to let you know. There's some one in the house to-night, sir. I can hear them whispering together at this moment; and so can you, if you will but listen.'

I advanced at once to the banisters, and certainly heard what seemed to be the sound of distant voices engaged in altercation; and, light in hand, followed by Dawson, I dashed down the staircase without further ceremony, in hopes of trapping the intruders.

But all in vain. Though we entered every room in turn, not a soul was visible.

I came to the conclusion that the whole alarm was due to Dawson's cowardice.

'You contemptible fool, you are as chicken-hearted as a woman!' I said, contemptuously. 'You hear the frogs croaking in the mere, or the wind blowing through the rushes, and you immediately conclude the house is full of thieves.'

'I didn't say it was thieves,' the man interposed, sullenly; but I took no notice of the muttered remark.

'If you are afraid to sleep downstairs by yourself,' I continued, 'say so; but don't come alarming your mistress again, in the middle of the night, for I won't allow it.'

The man slunk back into his room, with a reiteration that he had not been mistaken; and I returned to bed, full of complaints at having been so unnecessarily roused.

'If this kind of thing goes on,' I remarked to my wife,' I shall regret ever having set eyes on Rushmere. That a pack of silly maid-servants should see a robber in every bush is only to be expected; but how a sensible man like Dawson, and a woman of education like yourself, can permit your imagination to betray you into such foolish fears, is quite past my comprehension.'

Yet, notwithstanding my dose of philosophy, poor Jane looked so pale upon the following morning, that I was fain to devise

and carry into execution a little excursion into the neighbouring country before she regained her usual composure.

Some time passed without any further disturbance, and though upon several occasions I blamed myself for having brought a family, used to a populous city like London, to vegetate in so isolated a spot as Rushmere, I had almost forgotten the circumstances that had so much annoyed me.

We had now spent a month in our temporary home. The fields and hedgerows were bright with summer flowers, and the children passed most of their time tumbling amongst the new-mown hay. Janie had once more regained courage to sit by herself in the dusk, and to rest with tolerable security when she went to bed. I was rejoicing in the idea that all the folly that had marred the pleasure of our arrival at Rushmere had died a natural death, when it was vividly and painfully recalled to my mind by its actual recurrence.

Our second girl, a delicate little creature of about six years old, who, since the departure of her nurse, had slept in a cot in the same room as ourselves, woke me up in the middle of the night by exclaiming, in a frightened, plaintive voice, close to my ear,—

'Papa! papa! do you hear the footsteps? Some one is coming up the stairs!'

The tone was one of terror, and it roused my wife and myself instantly. The child was cold, and shaking all over with alarm, and I placed her by her mother's side before I left the room to ascertain if there was any truth in her assertion.

'Arthur, Arthur! I hear them as plainly as can be,' exclaimed my wife, who was as terrified as the child. 'They are on the second landing. There is no mistake about it this time.'

I listened at the half-opened door, and was compelled to agree with her. From whatever cause they arose, footsteps were to be distinctly heard upon the staircase—sometimes advancing, and then retreating, as though afraid to venture farther; but, still, not to be mistaken for anything but the sound of feet.

With a muttered exclamation, I seized my revolver.

'Don't be alarmed,' I said, hurriedly; 'there is not the slightest occasion for it. And, whatever happens, do not venture on the landing. I shall be quite safe.'

And without further preamble, only desirous to settle the business once for all, and give the intruders on my domains a

sharp lesson on the laws of *meum* and *tuum*, I sprang down the staircase. I had not stayed to strike a light; but the moon was shining blandly in at the uncurtained passage window, and the landing was as bright as day. Yet I saw no one there. The thief (if thief it were) must have already taken the alarm, and descended to the lowest regions. I fancied I could detect the same footsteps, but more distinctly marked, walk by me with a hurried, frightened movement, accompanied by a quick, sobbing breath; and, as I paused to consider what such a mystery could indicate, a pair of heavily-shod feet rushed past me, or seemed to rush, upon the stairs. I heard an angry shout commingle with a faint cry of terror below the landing whereon I stood; then, the discharge of a firearm, followed by a low groan of pain—and all was still.

Dark and mysterious though it appeared to be, I did not dream of ascribing the circumstance to any but a natural cause. But there was evidently no time for hesitation, and in another moment I had flown down the stairs, and stood in the moonlighted hall. It was empty! Chairs, table, hatstand, stood in their accustomed places; the children's garden hats and my fishing

tackle were strewn about; but of animated nature there was not a sign, of the recent scuffle not a trace!

All was quiet, calm, and undisturbed, and, as I gazed around in mute bewilderment, the perspiration stood in thick drops upon my brow and chin.

My first collected thought was for my wife and the best means by which to prevent her sharing the mystification and dread which I have no hesitation in confessing that I now experienced; but as I turned to remount the staircase, I caught sight of some dark mass lying at the further end of the passage, and going up to it, found to my surprise the body of Dawson, cold and insensible.

The explanation of the mystery was before me—so I immediately determined. The man, whom I knew to be replete with superstitious terror, imagining he heard the unaccountable noise of footsteps, had evidently supplied that which had reached my ear, and in his alarm at my approach had discharged his firearm at the supposed marauder. Pleasant for me if he had taken a better aim: So I thought as I dragged his unconscious body into his bedroom, and busied myself by restoring it to sensation.

As soon as he opened his eyes, and was sufficiently recovered to answer me, I asked,—

'What on earth made you discharge your gun, Dawson? I must take it out of your keeping, if your are so careless about using it.'

'I didn't fire, sir.'

'Nonsense! you don't know what you are talking about. I heard the shot distinctly as I came downstairs.'

'I am only telling you the truth, sir. There is the fowling-piece in that corner. I have not drawn the trigger since you last loaded it.'

I went up and examined the weapon. What Dawson had said was correct. It had not been used.

'Then who did fire?' I said, impatiently. 'I could swear to having heard the report.'

'And so could I, sir. It was that that knocked me over.'

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, sir, pray take the mistress and the children away from this place as soon as possible. It's no robbers that go up and down these stairs of nights, sir. It's something much worse than that.'

'Dawson, if you begin to talk such folly

to me, I'll discharge you on the spot. I believe the whole lot of you have gone mad.'

'But listen to my story, sir. I had gone to bed last night, as tired as possible, and thinking of nothing but getting a good long sleep. The first thing that roused me was some one trying the handle of my door. I lay and listened to it for some time before I was fully awake, and then I thought maybe you wanted something out of my room, and was trying not to wake me; so I got out of bed and opened the door. But there was nobody there, though I fancied I heard some one breathing hard a few yards off from me. Well, I thought to myself, sir, this is all nonsense; so I came back to bed again, and lay down. But I couldn't sleep; for directly the door was closed, I heard the footsteps again, creep, creeping along the passage and the wall, as though some one was crouching and feeling his way as he went. Then the handle of the door began to creak and turn again—I saw it turn, sir, with my own eyes, backwards and forwards, a dozen times in the moonlight; and then I heard a heavier step come stumbling downstairs, and there seemed to be a kind of scuffle. I couldn't stand it no longer, so I opened the door.

again ; and then, as I'm a living Christian, sir, I heard a woman's voice say 'Father!' with a kind of sob, and as the sound was uttered there came a report from the first landing, and the sound of a fall, and a deep groan in the passage below. And it seemed to go right through me, and curdle my blood, and I fell all of a heap where you found me. And it's nothing natural, sir, you may take my word for it; and harm will come of your stopping in this house.'

So saying, poor Dawson, who seemed in real earnest, fell back on his pillow with a heavy sigh.

'Dawson,' I said, critically, 'what did you eat for supper last night?'

'You're never going to put down what I've told you, sir, to supper. I took nothing but a little cold meat, upon my word. And I was as sensible, till that shot knocked me over, as you are this moment.'

'Do you mean to tell me that you seriously believe the report of a firearm could have reached your ears without one having been discharged?'

'But didn't you say you heard it yourself, sir?'

This knocked me over, and I did not know what to answer him. In the attempt to allay what I considered his unreasonable

fear, I had forgotten my own experience in the matter. And I knew that I had heard, or imagined I heard, a shot fired, and it would be very difficult for any one to persuade me I was mistaken. Still, though I held no belief in supernatural agencies, I was an earnest student of the philosophical and metaphysical school of Germany, and acquainted with all the revealed wonders of magnetism and animal electricity. It was impossible to say whether some such effect as I have described might not have been produced upon my brain by the reflection of the fear or fancy on that of my servant; and that as he had imagined the concussion of firearms, so I might have instantaneously received the impression of his mind. It was a nice question for argument, and not one to be thought over at that moment. All my present business lay in the effort to disabuse Dawson's mind of the reality of the shock it had received.

'I said I fancied I heard something like the report of a firearm; but as none had been fired, of course I must have been mistaken. Come, Dawson, I must go back, or Mrs Delamere will wonder what has become of me. I conclude you are not such a coward as to be afraid to be left by yourself?'

'I never feared a man in my life, sir; but the strongest heart can't stand up against spirits.'

'Spirits!' I exclaimed, angrily. 'I wonder what on earth you will talk to me about next? Now, I'll tell you what it is, Dawson—if I hear anything more of this, or am disturbed again at night by your folly, I'll pack you back to London without a character. Do you understand me?'

'I understand you, sir,' the man answered, humbly; and thereupon I left him to himself.

But, as I reascended the staircase, I was not satisfied either with my own half-formed solution of the mystery, or my servant's reception of my rebuke. He evidently would prefer dismissal to passing such another night. I could read the resolution in his face, although he had not expressed it in so many words. When I reached my wife's room, I was still more surprised. Janie and the child lay in a profound slumber. I had expected to find both of them in a state of anxious terror to learn the meaning of the noise that was going on below; but they had evidently heard nothing. This welcome fact, however, only tended to confirm me in the belief I had commenced to entertain, of

the whole circumstance being due to some, perhaps yet undiscovered, phase of brain reading, and I fell to sleep, resolved to make a deeper study of the marvels propounded by Mesmer and Kant. When I awoke, with the bright June sun streaming in at the windows, I had naturally parted with much of the impression of the night before. It is hard to associate any gloomy or unnatural thoughts with the unlimited glory of the summer's sunshine, that streams into every nook and cranny, and leaves no shadows anywhere. On this particular morning it seemed to have cleared the cobwebs off all our brains. The child had forgotten all about the occurrence of the night. I was, as usual, ready to laugh away all ghostly fears and fancies; and even Janie seemed to regard the matter as one of little moment.

'What was the matter last night, Arthur, dear?' she asked, when the subject recurred to her memory. 'I was so sleepy I couldn't keep awake till you came up again.'

'Didn't you hear the fearful battle I held with the goblins in the hall?' I demanded, gaily, though I put the question with a purpose,—'the shots that were exchanged between us, and the groans of the defeated,

as they slunk away into their haunted coal-cellars and cupboards ?'

'Arthur, what nonsense! Was there any noise ?'

'Well, I frightened Dawson, and Dawson frightened me; and we squabbled over it for the best part of an hour. I thought our talking might have disturbed you.'

'Indeed, it didn't, then. But don't mention it before Cissy, Arthur, even in fun, for she declares she heard some one walking about the room, and I want her to forget it.'

I dropped the subject; but meeting Dawson as I was smoking my pipe in the garden that afternoon, I ventured to rally him on his fright of the night before, and to ask if he hadn't got over it by that time.

'No, sir; and I never shall,' he replied, with a sort of shiver. 'And I only hope you may come to be convinced of the truth of it before it's too late to prevent harm you may never cease to repent of.'

There was so much respectful earnestness in the man's manner, that I could not resent his words nor laugh at them, as I had done before; and I passed by him in thoughtful silence.

What if there were more in all this than I had ever permitted myself to imagine ?

What if the assertions of my man-servant, the unaffected terror of my wife and child, the fears of my nurse, the evident shrinking of the old woman who had charge of the house, the opposition from the servants of the neighbouring town, combined with what I had heard myself, were not simple chimeras of the brain—fancies engendered by superstition or timidity or ignorance; but indications of a power beyond our control, the beginning and the end of which may alike remain unknown until all things are revealed? I had, with the majority of educated men, manfully resisted all temptation to believe in the possibility of spirits, of whatever grade, making themselves either seen or heard by mortal senses. I use the word 'manfully,' although I now believe it to be the height of manliness to refuse to discredit that which we cannot disprove, and to have sufficient humility to accept the belief that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. But at that juncture I should have considered such a concession both childish and cowardly. Yet, there was sufficient doubt in my mind, notwithstanding the glorious June sun, respecting my adventure of the night before, that I resolved, whatever happened, that I would

satisfy myself as to the value of the fears of those about me.

I could not keep my wife and children in a house where they might be liable at any moment to be frightened out of their seven senses, from whatever cause, without ascertaining the reason of it. Some reason there must be, either natural or otherwise ; and I determined, if possible, to learn it that very night. I would not tell Dawson or anyone of my intention ; but I would keep watch and ward in the old parlour on the ground floor, so as to be ready to rush out at a moment's notice, and seize any intruder who might attempt to disturb us. I still believed—I could not but believe—that the footsteps which so many of us had heard were due to some trickster, who wished to play upon our nerves in that lonely old house. I had heard of such things being done, purposely to keep visitors away ; and I determined, whosoever it might be, whether our own servants or strangers, that they must take their chance of being shot down like any other robber.

According to my resolution, I said nothing to Janie, but tried to render the evening as cheerful and merry a one as possible.

I ordered strawberries and cream into the hay-field, and played with my troop of little ones there, until they were so tired they could hardly walk for the short distance that lay between them and their beds. As soon as they were dismissed, and we had returned to the house, I laid aside the newspapers that had arrived by that morning's post, and which I usually reserved for the evening's delectation, and taking my wife upon my knee, as in the dear old courting days, talked to her until she had forgotten everything but the topics on which we conversed, and had no time to brood upon the coming night, and the fears it usually engendered. Then, as a last duty, I carried to Dawson with my own hands a strong decoction of brandy and water, with which I had mixed something that I knew, under ordinary circumstances, must make him sleep till daylight.

'Drink this,' I said to him. 'From whatever cause, our nerves were both shaken last night, and a little stimulant will do neither of us harm.'

'Thank you, sir,' he replied, as he finished the tumbler at a draught; 'I don't deny I'm glad to have it. I dread the thoughts of the night before us.'

'Lock your door on the inside,' I added

as I left him, 'and don't get up whether the handle moves or not. Then, at all events, you will feel secure till the morrow.'

'Keys won't keep *them* out,' muttered Dawson, as he entered his sleeping apartment.

But I would not notice the allusion, though I understood it.

I went up to bed with my wife as usual; and it was not until I saw she was sound asleep that, habited in my dressing-gown and slippers, I ventured to creep softly out of the room and take my way downstairs again.

It was then about twelve o'clock. The moonlight was as bright as it had been the night before, and made every object distinctly visible. From the loud snoring which proceeded from Dawson's room, I concluded that my opiate had taken due effect, and that I should be permitted to hold my vigil undisturbed. In one hand I grasped a loaded revolver, and in the other a huge knotted stick, so determined was I not to be taken by my tormentors at a disadvantage. I turned into the general sitting-room, which opened on the hall. All was as we had left it; and I ensconced myself on one of the large old-fashioned

sofas, trusting to my curiosity to keep me awake.

It was weary waiting. I heard one and then two sound from the big clock in the hall; still there was no other noise to break the silence. I began to relapse into my first belief that the whole business was due to imagination. From this I passed to self-satisfaction; self-satisfaction induced inertion, and inertion brought on heavy sleep. How long I slept I do not know, but I had reason afterwards to think, not more than half-an-hour.

However, that point is immaterial. But what waked me—waked me so completely that in a moment all my faculties were as clear as daylight—was the sound of a hoarse breathing. I sat up on the sofa and rubbed my eyes.

The room was fully lighted by the moon. I could see into each corner. Nothing was visible. The sound I had heard must then have proceeded from outside the door, which was open; and I turned towards it, fully expecting to see Dawson enter in a somnambulistic condition, brought on by his dreams and my soporific.

But he did not appear. I rose and looked into the hall. It was empty, as before. Still the breathing continued, and

(as I, with now fully-awakened faculties, discovered) proceeded from a corner of the parlour where stood an old-fashioned secretary and a chair. Not daring to believe my senses, I advanced to the spot and listened attentively. The sound continued, and was unmistakably palpable. The breathing was hoarse and laboured, like that of an old man who was suffering from bronchitis or asthma. Every now and then it was interrupted by a short, roupy cough. What I suffered under this mysterious influence I can hardly tell. Interest and curiosity got the better of my natural horror; but even then I could not but feel that there was something very awful in this strange contact of sound without sight. Presently my eyes were attracted by the chair, which was pushed, without any visible agency, towards the wall. Something rose—I could hear the action of the feet. Something moved—I could hear it approaching the spot where I stood motionless. Something brushed past me, almost roughly—I could feel the contact of a cloth garment against my dressing-gown, and heard the sound of coarsely shod feet leaving the room. My hair was almost standing on end with terror; but I was determined to follow the mystery to

its utmost limits, whether my curiosity were satisfied by the attempt or not.

I rushed after the clumping feet into the hall; and I heard them slowly and painfully, and yet most distinctly, commence to toil up the staircase. But before they had reached the first landing, and just as I was about to follow in their wake, my attention was distracted by another sound, which appeared to be close at my elbow—the sound of which Dawson had complained the night before—that of a creeping step, and a stifled sobbing, as though a woman were feeling her way along the passage in the dark. I could discern the feeble touch as it felt along the wall, and then placed an uncertain hold upon the banisters—could hear the catching breath, which dared not rise into a cry, and detect the fear which caused the feet to advance and retreat, and advance a little way again, and then stop, as though dread of some unknown calamity overpowered every other feeling. Meanwhile, the clumping steps, that had died away in the distance, turned, and appeared to be coming downstairs again. The moon streamed brightly in at the landing window. Had a form been visible, it would have been as distinctly seen as by day. I experienced a sense of coming horror, and

drew back in the shadow of the wall. As the heavy footsteps gained the lower landing, I heard a start—a scuffle—a faint cry of 'Father!' and then a curse—the flash of a firearm—a groan—and I remember nothing more.

When I recovered my consciousness, I was lying on the flat of my back in the passage, as I had found poor Dawson the night before, and the morning sun was shining full upon my face. I sat up, rubbed my eyes, and tried to remember how I had come there. Surely the moon had looked in at that window when I saw it last. Then in a moment came back upon my mind all that I had heard whilst holding my vigil during the past night; and I sprang to my feet, to see if I could discover any traces of the tragedy which seemed to have been enacted in my very presence.

But it was in vain I searched the parlour, the passage, and the stairs. Everything remained in its usual place. Even the chair, which I could swear I saw pushed against the wall, was now standing primly before the secretary, and the door of the room was closed, as it usually was when we retired for the night. I slunk up to my dressing-room, anxious that my wife should

not discover that I had never retired to rest; and having plunged my head and face into cold water, took my way across the sunlighted fields, to see if the fresh morning air might not be successful in clearing away the confusion with which my brain was oppressed. But I had made up my mind on one point, and that was that we would move out of Rushmere as soon as it was possible to do so. After a stroll of a couple of hours, I re-approached the house. The first person I encountered was the under nurse, Susan, who ran to meet me with a perturbed countenance.

'Oh, sir, I'm so thankful you've come back! Dawson has been looking for you for the last hour, for poor missus is so ill, and we don't know what on earth to do with her.'

'Ill! In what way?' I demanded quickly.

'That's what we can't make out, sir. Miss Cissy came up crying to the nursery, the first thing this morning, to tell me that her mamma had tumbled out of bed, and wouldn't speak to her; and she couldn't find her papa. So I ran downstairs directly, sir; and there I found my mistress on the ground, quite insensible, and she hasn't moved a limb since.'

'Good heavens!' I inwardly exclaimed,

as I ran towards the house, 'is it possible she can have been affected by the same cause?'

I found Janie, as the nurse had said, unconscious; and it was some time before my remedies had any effect on her. When she opened her eyes, and understood the condition she had been in, she was seized with such a fit of nervous terror that she could do nothing but cling to me, and entreat me to take her away from Rushmere.

Remembering my own experience, I readily promised her that she should not sleep another night in the house if she did not desire it. Soothed by my words, she gradually calmed down, and was at last able to relate the circumstance which had so terrified her.

'Did you sleep in my room last night, dear Arthur?' she asked, curiously.

'I did not. But since you awoke, you surely must have been aware of my absence.'

'I know nothing, and remember nothing, except the awful horror that overpowered me. I had gone to sleep very happy last night, and none of my silly fears, as you have called them, ever entered my head. Indeed, I think I was in the midst of some pleasant dream, when I was awakened by

the sound of a low sobbing by the bedside. Oh! such a strange, unearthly sobbing' (with a shudder). 'I thought at first it must be poor little Cissy, who had been frightened again, and I put out my hand to her, saying,—"Don't be afraid, dear. I am here." Directly, a hand was placed in mine—a cold, damp hand, with a death-like, clayey feel about it that made me tremble. I knew at once it was not the child's hand, and I started up in bed, exclaiming,—"Who are you?"

'The room was quite dark, for I had pinned my shawl across the blind to keep the moon out of my eyes before I went to bed, and I could distinguish nothing. Yet still the cold, damp hand clung to mine, and seemed to strike the chill of death into my very bones. When I said, "Who are you?" something replied to me. I cannot say it was a voice. It was more like some one hissing at me through closed teeth, but I could distinguish the name "Emily."

'I was so frightened, Arthur, I did not know what to do. I wrenched my hand away from the dead hand. You were not there, and I called out loudly. I would have leaped out of bed, but that I heard the creeping footsteps, accompanied by the

sobbing breath, go round the room, crying, "Father, father!"

'My blood seemed to curdle in my veins. I could not stir until it was gone. I heard it leave the room distinctly, although the door was never opened, and walk upon the landing as though to go downstairs. I was still sitting up in bed listening—listening—only waiting till the dreadful thing had quite gone away, to seek your presence, when I heard a heavy step clumping downstairs, then the report of a gun. I don't know *what* I thought. I remember nothing that followed; but I suppose I jumped out of bed with the intention of finding you, and fainted before I could reach the dressing-room. Oh, Arthur! what was it? What is it that haunts this house, and makes even the sunshine look as gloomy as night? Oh, take us away from it, or I am sure that something terrible will happen!'

'I *will* take you away from it, my dear. We will none of us sleep another night beneath its roof. What curse hangs over it, I cannot tell; but whether the strange sounds we have heard proceed from natural or supernatural causes, they alike render Rushmere no home for us. We will go to the hotel at —— this very day, Janie, and

deliver up the keys of Rushmere again to Messrs Quibble & Lye.'

I then related to her my own experience, and that of Dawson; and though she trembled a little whilst listening to me, the idea of leaving the place before nightfall rendered the heavy fear less alarming than it would otherwise have been.

The servants, upon learning the resolution we had arrived at, were only too ready to help us to carry it out. Our personal possessions were packed in an incredibly short time, and we sat down that evening to a comfortable family dinner in the good old-fashioned inn at ——. As soon as the meal was concluded, and the children sent to bed, I said to my wife,—

'Janie, I am going to ring for the landlord, to see if he can throw any light on the cause of our experiences. I never told you that, when we came to this inn to try for a nurse to supply Mary's place, he informed me that nobody from his country-side would live at Rushmere; and asked me, in a manner which assured me he could have said more if he had chosen, if we had not heard anything whilst there. I laughed at the question then, but I do not feel so disposed to laugh at it now; and I am going to beg him to tell me all he may

know. If nothing more, his story may form the stratum of a curious psychological study. Would you like to be present at our interview?'

'Oh yes, Arthur; I have quite recovered my nerves since I've lost sight of Rushmere, and I feel even curious to learn all I can upon the subject. That poor, sobbing voice that whispered "Emily"—I shall not forget its sound to my dying day.'

'Ring the bell, dear, and let us ask if the landlord is at leisure. To my mind, your experience of the details of this little tragedy appears the most interesting of all.'

The landlord, a Mr Browser, entered at once; and as soon as he heard my request, made himself completely at home with us.

'After the little rebuff you gave me t'other day, I shouldn't have ventured to say nothing, sir; but when I see your family getting out of the fly this afternoon, I says to Mrs Browser, "If that don't mean that they can't stand Rushmere another night, I'm a pumpkin." And I suppose, now, it did mean it, sir?'

'You are quite right, Mr Browser. The noises and voices about the house have become so intolerable, that it is quite impossible I can keep my family there. Still,

I must tell you that, though I have been unable to account for the disturbances, I do not necessarily believe they are attributable to spirits. It is because I do not believe so that I wish to hear all you may be able to tell us, in order, if possible, to find a reason for what appears at present to be unreasonable.'

'Well, sir, you shall hear, as you say, all we have to tell you, and then you can believe what you like. But it ain't I as can relate the story, sir. Mrs Browser knows a deal more than I do; and with your leave, and that of this good lady here, I'll call her to give you the history of Rushmere.'

At this information, we displayed an amount of interest that resulted in a hasty summons for Mrs Browser. She was a fat, fair woman, of middle age, with ruddy cheeks, and a clear blue eye—not at all like a creature haunted by her own weak imagination, or who would be likely to mistake a shadow for a substance. Her appearance inspired me with confidence. I trusted that her relation might furnish me with some clue to the solution of the occurrences that had so confounded us. Safe out of the precincts of Rushmere, and with the lapse of twelve hours since the

unaccountable swoon I had been seized with, my practical virtues were once more in the ascendant, and I was inclined to attribute our fright to anything but association with the marvellous.

'Be I to tell the story from the beginning, Browser?' was the first sentence that dropped from Mrs Browser's lips.

Her lord and master nodded an affirmative, whereupon she began :—

'When the gentleman as built Rushmere for his own gratification, sir, died, the house let well enough. But the place proved lonely, and there was more than one attempt at robbery, and people grew tired of taking it. And above all, the girls of the village began to refuse to go to service there. Well, it had been standing empty for some months, when a gentleman and his wife came to look after it. Browser and I—we didn't own this inn at that time, you will understand, sir, but kept a general shop in the village, and were but poorly off altogether, although we had the post-office at our place, and did the best business thereabouts. The key of Rushmere used always to be left in our keeping, too, and our boy would go up to show folks over the house. Well, one damp autumn

day—I mind the day as if 'twere yesterday, for Browser had been ailing sadly with the rheumatics for weeks past, and not able to lift his hand to his head—this gentleman and lady, who went by the name of Greenslade, came for the keys of Rushmere. I remember thinking Mr Greenslade had a nasty, curious look about his eyes, and that his wife seemed a poor, brow-beaten creature; but that was no business of mine, and I sent Bill up with them to show the house. They took it, and entered on possession at once; and then came the difficulty about the servants. Not a soul would enter the place at first. Then a girl or two tried it, and came away when their month was up, saying the house was so lonesome, they couldn't sleep at nights, and the master was so queer-spoken and mannered, they were afraid of him.'

'Don't forget to say what he was used to do at nights,' here put in the landlord.

'La, Browser, I'm a-coming to it. Everything in its time. Well, sir, at last it came to this, that Mrs Greenslade hadn't a creature to help her in anythink, and down she came to ask if I would go to them for a few days. I stared; for there was the shop to be tended, and the post-office looked after, and I hadn't been

used to odd jobs like that. But my husband said that he could do all that was wanted in the business; and we were very hard drove just then, and the lady offered such liberal pay, he over-persuaded me to go, if only on trial. So I put my pride in my pocket, and went out charing. I hadn't been at Rushmere many days, sir, before I found something was very wrong there. Mr Greenslade hardly ever spoke a word, but shut himself up in a room all day, or went mooning about the fields and common, where he couldn't meet a soul; and as for the poor lady, la! my heart bled for her, she seemed so wretched and broken-down and hopeless. I used often to say to her,—

'"Now, ma'am, do let me cook you a bit of something nice, for you've eaten nothing since yesterday, and you'll bring yourself down to death's door at this rate."

'And she'd answer,—

'"No, thank you, Mrs Browser: I couldn't touch it. I feel sometimes as if I'd never care to eat or drink again."

'And Mr Greenslade, he was just as bad. They didn't eat enough to keep a well-grown child between the two of them.'

'What-aged people were they?' I asked.

'Well, sir, I can hardly say; they weren't young nor yet old. Mr Greenslade, he may have been about fifty, and his lady a year or two younger; but I never took much count of that. But the gentleman looked much the oldest of the two, by reason of a stoop in his shoulders and a constant cough that seemed to tear his chest to pieces. I've known him shut himself up in the parlour the whole night long, coughing away fit to keep the whole house awake. And his breathing, sir—you could hear it half a mile off.'

'He was *assmatical*, poor man! that's where it was,' interposed Mr Browser.

'Well, I don't know what his complaint was called, Browser; but he made noise enough over it to wake the dead. But don't you go interrupting me no more after that fashion, or the gentleman and lady will never understand the half of my story, and I'm just coming to the cream of it.'

'I assure you we are deeply interested in what you are telling us,' I said, politely.

'It's very good of you to compliment me, sir, but I expect it will make matters clearer to you by-and-by. You're not the first tenants of Rushmere I've had to tell this tale to, I can tell you, and you won't be the last, either. One night, when I

couldn't sleep for his nasty cough, and lay awake, wishing to goodness he'd go to bed like a Christian, I made sure I heard footsteps in the hall, a-creeping and a-creeping about like, as though some one was feeling their way round the house. "It can't be the mistress," I thought, "and maybe it's robbers, as have little idea the master's shut up in the study." So I opened the door quickly, but I could see nothing.'

'Exactly my own experience,' I exclaimed.

'Ah, sir, maybe; but they weren't the same footsteps, poor dear. I wish they had been, and she had the same power to tread now she had then. The hall was empty; but at the same time I heard the master groaning and cursing most awful in the parlour, and I went into my own room again, that I mightn't listen to his wicked oaths and words. I always hated and distrusted that man from the beginning. The next day I mentioned I had heard footsteps, before 'em both, and the rage Mr Greenslade put himself into was terrible. He said no robbers had better break into his house, or he'd shoot them dead as dogs. Afterwards his wife came to me and asked me what sort of footsteps they seemed; and when I told her, she cried upon my

neck, and begged me if ever I heard a woman's step to say nothing of it to her husband.

'"A woman's step, ma'am," I replied; "why, what woman would dare break into a house?"

'But she only cried the more, and held her tongue.

'But that evening I heard their voices loud in the parlour, and there was a regular dispute between them.

'"If ever she should come, Henry," Mrs Greenslade said, "promise me you won't speak to her unless you can say words of pity or of comfort."

'"Pity!" he yelled, "what pity has she had for me? If ever she or any emissary of hers should dare to set foot upon these premises, I shall treat them as house-breakers, and shoot them down like dogs!"

'"Oh no! Henry, no!" screamed the poor woman; "think who she is. Think of her youth, her temptation, and forgive her."

'"I'll never forgive her—I'll never own her!" the wretch answered loudly; "but I'll treat her, or any of the cursed crew she associates with, as I would treat strangers who forced their way in to rob me by night.

'Twill be an evil day for them when they attempt to set foot in my house."

'Well, sir, I must cut this long story short, or you and your good lady will never get to bed to-night.

'The conversation I had overheard made me feel very uncomfortable, and I was certain some great misfortune or disgrace had happened to the parties I was serving; but I didn't let it rest upon my mind, till a few nights after, when I was wakened up by the same sound of creeping footsteps along the passage. As I sat up in bed and listened to them, I heard the master leave the parlour and go upstairs. At the same moment something crouched beside my door, and tried to turn the handle; but it was locked, and wouldn't open. I felt very uneasy. I knew my door stood in the shadow, and that whoever crouched there must have been hidden from Mr Greenslade as he walked across the hall. Presently I heard his footsteps coming downstairs again, as though he had forgotten something. He used to wear such thick boots, sir, you might hear his step all over the house. His loaded gun always stood on the first landing; when he reached there he stopped, I suppose it was his bad angel made him stop. Anyway, there was a low cry of

"Father, father!"—a rush, the report of the gun, a low groan, and then all was still.

'La! sir, I trembled so in my bed, you might have seen it shake under me.'

'I've seen it shake under you many a time,' said Browser.

'Perhaps you would like to tell the lady and gentleman my exact weight, though I don't see what that's got to do with the story,' replied his better half, majestically.

'I don't think I should ever have had the courage to leave my room, sir, unless I had heard my poor mistress fly down the staircase, with a loud scream. Then I got up, and joined her. Oh, it was an awful sight! There, stretched on the floorcloth, lay the dead body of a young girl; and my mistress had fainted dead away across her, and was covered with the blood that was pouring from a great hole in her forehead. On the landing stood my master, white as a sheet, and shaking like an aspen leaf.

'"So, this is your doing!" I cried, angrily. "You're a nice man to have charge of a gun. Do you see what you've done? Killed a poor girl in mistake for a robber, and nearly killed your wife into the bargain. Who is this poor murdered young creature? Do you know her?"

'"Know her!" he repeated, with a groan. "Woman, don't torture me with your questions. *She is my own daughter!*"

'He rushed upstairs as he spoke, and I was in a nice quandary, left alone with the two unconscious women. When my poor mistress woke up again, she wanted me to fetch a doctor; but it would have been of no use. She was past all human help.

'We carried the corpse upstairs between us, and laid it gently on the bed. I've often wondered since where the poor mother's strength came from, but it was lent her for the need. Then, sitting close to me for the remainder of the night, she told me her story—how the poor girl had led such an unhappy life with her harsh, ill-tempered father, that she had been tempted into a foolish marriage by the first lover that offered her affection and a peaceful home.

'"I always hoped she would come back to us," said Mrs Greenslade, "for her husband had deserted her, leaving her destitute; and yet, although she knew how to enter the house unobserved, I dreaded her doing so, because of her father's bitter enmity. Only last night, Mrs Browser, I awoke from sleep, and fancied I heard a

sobbing in my room. I whispered, 'Who is there?' and a voice replied, 'Emily!' But I thought it was a dream. If I had known—if I had but known!"

'She lay so quiet and uncomplaining on my knee, only moving now and then, that she frightened me; and when the morning broke, I tried to shift her, and said,—

'"Hadn't I better go and see after the master, ma'am?"

'As I mentioned his name, I could see the shudder that ran through her frame; but she motioned me away with her hand.

'I went upstairs to a room Mr Greenslade called his dressing-room, and where I guessed he'd gone; and you'll never believe, sir, the awful sight as met my eyes. I didn't get over it for a month—did I, Browser?'

'You haven't got over it to this day, I'm sometimes thinking, missus.'

'That means I'm off my head; but if it wasn't for my head, I wonder where the business would go to. No, sir—if you'll believe me, when I entered the room, there was the old man dead as mutton, hanging from a beam in the ceiling. I gave one shriek, and down I fell.'

'I don't wonder at it,' cried Janie.

'Well, ma'am, when I came to again, all was confusion and misery. We had the perlice in, and the crowner's inquest, and there was such a fuss, you never see. Some of Mrs Greenslade's friends came and fetched her away; but I heard she didn't live many months afterwards. As for myself, I was only too glad to get back to the shop and my old man, and the first words I said to him was,—

'"No more charing for me."'

'And now, sir, if I may make so bold, what do you think of the story?' demanded the landlord. 'Can you put this and that together now?'

'It is marvellous!' I replied. 'Your wife has simply repeated the scene which we have heard enacted a dozen times in Rushmere. The footsteps were a nightly occurrence.'

'I heard the voice!' exclaimed Janie, 'and it whispered "*Emily.*"'

'The handle of my servant's door was turned. The report of the gun was as distinct as possible.'

'That is what everybody says as goes to Rushmere, sir. No one can abide the place since that awful murder was committed there,' said Mrs Browser.

'And can you account for it in any way, sir?' demanded her husband, slyly. 'Do you think, now that you've heard the story, that the noises are mortal, or that it's the spirits of the dead that causes them?'

'I don't know what to think, Browser. There is a theory that no uttered sound is ever lost, but drifts as an eddying circle into space, until in course of time it must be heard again. Thus our evil words, too often accompanied by evil deeds, live for ever, to testify against us in eternity. It may be that the Universal Father ordains that some of His guilty children shall expurgate their crimes by re-acting them until they become sensible of their enormity; but this can be but a matter for speculation. This story leaves us, as such stories usually do, as perplexed as we were before. We cannot tell—we probably never *shall* tell—what irrefragable laws of the universe these mysterious circumstances fulfil; but we know that spirit and matter alike are in higher hands than ours; and, whilst nature cannot help trembling when brought in contact with the supernatural, we have no need to fear that it will ever be permitted to work us harm.'

This little analysis was evidently too

much for Mr and Mrs Browser, who, with a look of complete mystification on their countenances, rose from their seats, and wished us respectfully good-night; leaving Janie and me to evolve what theories we chose from the true story of the Invisible Tenants of Rushmere.

AMY'S LOVER.

IT was five o'clock—five o'clock on a dull November afternoon—as I, Elizabeth Lacy, the wretched companion of Lady Cunningham, of Northampton Lodge, in the town of Rockledge, stood gazing from the dining-room windows at the grey curtain of fog which was slowly but surely rising between my vision and all outward things, and thinking how like it was in colour and feeling and appearance to my own sad life. I have said that I was the 'wretched' companion of Lady Cunningham: is it very ungrateful of me to have written down that word? I think not; for if a wearisome seclusion and continual servitude have power to make a

young life miserable, mine had fairly earned its title to be called so. I had withered in the cold and dispiriting atmosphere of Northampton Lodge for four years past, and had only been prevented rupturing my chains by the knowledge that I had no alternative but to rush from one state of bondage to another. To attend upon old ladies like an upper servant—to write their letters, carry their shawls, and wait upon them as they moved from room to room—this was to be my lot through life; and if I ever dreamed that a brighter one might intervene, the vision was too faint and idealistic to gild the stern realities which were no dreams.

I daresay there are plenty of people in this world more miserable than I: indeed, I knew it for a fact even at the time of which I speak; and the few friends I possessed were never tired of telling me that I was better off than many, and that I should strive to look on the bright side of things, and to thank heaven who had provided me with a safe and respectable home, when I might have been upon the parish. Did not Job have friends to console him in his trouble? Do not we all find in the day of our distress that, whatever else fails, good advice is always

forthcoming? Well! perhaps I *was* ungrateful: at all events, I was young and headstrong, and good advice irritated and worried, instead of making me any better. I knew that I was warmly clothed, whilst beggars stood shivering at the corner of the streets, and that beneath the care of Lady Cunningham no harm could happen to me, whilst women younger than myself broke God's holy laws to put bread in their mouths. And yet, and yet, so perverse is human nature, and so perverse was mine above all others, that, engaged on my monotonous round of duty, I often envied the beggars their liberty and their rags; and even sometimes wished that I had not been reared so honestly, and had the courage to be less respectable and more free. Perhaps one reason why my life chafed me so fearfully, was because I had not been brought up to it. Five years before, I had been the child of parents in good circumstances, and loved and made much of, as only daughters generally are. My father, who held the comfortable living of Fairmead in Dorsetshire, had always managed to keep up the household of a gentleman, and my poor delicate mother and myself had enjoyed every luxury consistent with our station in life. She had

had her flower-garden and her poultry and her pony-chair, and I my pets and my piano and—my lover. Ah! as I stood at the wire-blinded windows of Lady Cunningham's dining-room that sad November afternoon, and recalled these things, I knew by the pang which assailed me at the thought of Bruce Armytage, which loss of them all had affected me most. My father and mother, who from my youth up had so tenderly loved and guarded me, were in their graves, and with them had vanished all the luxuries and possessions of my early days. But though I stood there a penniless orphan, with no joy in my present and very little hope in my future, the tears had not rushed to my eyes until my memory had rested on Bruce Armytage; and then they fell so thickly that they nearly blinded me; for mingled with his memory came shame as well as regret, and to a woman perhaps shame is the harder feeling of the two. His conduct had been so very strange, so marvellously strange and unaccountable to me, that to that day I had found no clue to it. When he first came down and took lodgings in Fairmead—for the purpose of studying to pass his examination for the law, he said—he had seemed so very, very fond of

me that our engagement followed on the avowal of his love as a matter of course. But then his family interfered; they thought, perhaps, that he ought to marry some one higher than myself, though my father was a gentleman, and no man can be more; at any rate, *his* father wrote to say that Bruce was far too young (his age was then just twenty) to fix upon his choice for life, and that no regular engagement must be made between us until he returned from the two years' foreign tour he was about to make. My father and mother said that old Mr Armytage was right, and that in two years' time both I and my lover would be better able to form an opinion on so serious a matter. Bruce and I declared it was all nonsense, that fifty years of separation could make no difference to us, and that what we felt then, we should feel to our lives' end. And they smiled, the old people, whilst our young hearts were being tortured, and talked about the evanescence of youthful feelings, whilst we drank our first draught of this world's bitterness. How seldom can old people sympathise with the young! How soon they become accustomed to the cold neutral tints of middle age, and forget even the appearance of the warm fires of youth at which

they lighted those passions which time has reduced to ashes! It was so with my parents: they were not unkind, but they were unsympathetic; they rather hoped, upon the whole, that I should forget Bruce Armytage; and, in order to accomplish their end, they pretended to believe it. But he went, with the most passionate protestations upon his lips, that as soon as he returned to England, no earthly power should keep us separate; and he never came back to me again! My father and mother had died rather suddenly, and within a few months of each other; our home had been broken up, and at the age of nineteen I had been sent forth upon the world to earn my own living; and, at the age of three-and-twenty, I was at the same trade, neither richer nor poorer than at first, but with all my faith in the constancy and honour of mankind broken and destroyed; for Bruce Armytage had never found me out, or, as far as I knew, inquired after me. His family had permitted me to leave Fairmead and enter on my solitary career without a word of remonstrance or regret; since which time I had had no communication with them, though at that period my pride would not have forbidden my sending an account of my trouble to Bruce,

believing that he cared for me. Correspondence between us during his foreign tour had been strictly prohibited, and I had no means of ascertaining his address. For a while I had expected he would write or come to me; but that hope had long died out, and the only feeling I had left for him was contempt—contempt for his fickleness and vacillation, or the pusillanimity which could permit him to give up the woman he had sworn to marry because his father ordered him to do so. No! filial obedience carries very little weight with the heart that is pitted against it; and as I thought of it and him, I bit my lip, dashed my hand across my eyes, and hoped the day might yet come when I should be able to show Bruce Armytage how greatly I despised him.

At this juncture the housemaid came bustling into the room with a little note for me—a dear little cocked-hat note—which seemed to speak of something pleasant, and at the writer of which I had no need to guess, for I had but one friend in Rockledge who ever sent such notes to me.

'Waiting for an answer,' said the bearer curtly; and I tore it open and devoured its contents.

'DEAR LIZZIE,—I think you will be *very much* surprised to hear that your little friend Amy is engaged to be married! However, it is quite true, although the business was only settled this morning; and the young gentleman has promised to spend the evening with us, and to bring a cousin whom he is anxious to introduce. Will you come and take tea with us also? The doctor has only just told me that Lady Cunningham dines out to-night, or I should have sent before. Do come, Lizzie. Amy is crazy to see you and tell you all her secrets, and you know that you are always sure of a welcome from your affectionate friend,

'MARY RODWELL.'

The perusal of this little epistle threw me into a perfect whirl of excitement and delight, which would have appeared extraordinary to any one who had not been acquainted with the maddening monotony of my daily existence. These Rodwells, the family of the good old doctor who attended Lady Cunningham, were my only friends in Rockledge, the only people with whom I ever caught a glimpse of a happy domestic life, such as had been once my own. To spend the evening at their large, old-

fashioned house, which rang from basement to attic with the sound of happy voices, was the only dissipation by which my days were ever varied, and a relaxation all the more precious because, on account of Lady Cunningham's requirements, it came so rarely to me. And on the afternoon in question, when I had allowed myself to become absorbed by fanciful thought, the cordial and unexpected invitation warmed my chilled spirits like a draught of generous wine. All things seemed changed for me: I no longer saw the grey fog nor remembered my mournful past, but in their stead pictured to myself the brightly-lighted, crimson-curtained room at Dr Rodwell's house, and heard the ringing laughter and merry jests of his many boys and girls. In a moment I had shaken off my despondency—my eyes sparkled, my heart beat: I was in a flutter of anticipation at the pleasure in store for me.

'Is there any answer, miss?' demanded the housemaid, who had been waiting whilst I read my note.

'Yes, yes; I will go, of course. Say I will be there in half-an-hour,' I replied, for my evening, in consequence of Lady Cunningham's absence, was at my own disposal.

'And, Mary, please bring me up a jug of hot water; I am going to take tea with Mrs Rodwell.'

'Well, I'm very glad of it, miss; it's a shame you shouldn't have a holiday oftener than you do,' returned my sympathising hearer as she departed with my answer.

I must say that, during my years of servitude, I had nothing to complain of respecting the treatment I received from the hands of servants. I have read of needy companions and governesses being cruelly insulted and trampled on by their inferiors; I never was. From the first they saw I was a gentlewoman, and to the last they treated me as such.

With a hasty vote of thanks to Mary for her kind speech, I ran upstairs to my own bedroom to make the few preparations needful for my visit. I knew that Mrs Rodwell would not desire me to dress; but to arrange my hair anew with a blue ribbon woven in it, and to change my dark merino body for a clear muslin Garibaldi, made me look fresh and smart, without taking up too much of the precious time I had to spend at her house. Besides, were there not to be some gentlemen present? At that thought my mind reverted to the wonderful news of Amy's engagement, and

I could scarcely proceed with my toilet for thinking of it. Little Amy! younger by five years than myself, who had always appeared so shy and modest and retiring —was it possible she could have had a lover without my knowing it? And now to be actually engaged! going to be married at her age! It almost seemed incredible, until I remembered with a sudden sigh that I had been no older myself when Bruce Armytage proposed to me, and had been able to keep my secret very well until the necessity for doing so was over.

But I would not let such thoughts engross me now, for I had no wish to carry a long face to Mrs Rodwell's house; and so I hurried on the remainder of my things, and wrapping myself up warmly in a dark cloak, hurried bravely out into the evening air. It was then six o'clock, and the fog was denser than before; but what cared I for outer dulness any longer? My imagination ran on before me, vividly picturing the cheerful scene in which I should so soon mingle, and my feet tripped after it joyous as my heart. I had not far to go, and my eagerness shortened the way; so that in a few minutes I was rapping at Dr Rodwell's hall door and scraping my feet upon his

scraper. How quickly it was opened by little Amy herself! And what a mixture of bashfulness, pleasure, and self-importance was in her blushing face as I threw my arms around her neck and warmly congratulated her.

'Come upstairs, Lizzie,' she entreated in a whisper; 'come up and take off your things, and I'll tell you all about it.'

We were soon in her own room—that cosy room in which she and her younger sister Mattie slept, and which bore so many evidences of their mother's tender care and thought for them.

'And so you are really engaged to be married, Amy?' I exclaimed as the door closed behind us. 'That was a very astounding piece of intelligence to me, who had never heard the faintest whisper of such a thing before.'

'You forget you have not been near us for a month,' she answered, laughing; 'but the truth is, Lizzie, it was all so uncertain till this morning that mamma said it would be very unwise to mention it to anybody; so that you were the first recipient of the news, after all.'

'Well, I suppose I must be satisfied with that; and when did you meet him, Amy?'

'Last month, up in London, while I was staying with my Aunt Charlesworth.'

'And is it a settled thing, then?'

'Oh yes! His parents have consented, and are coming to Rockledge on purpose to call on us. And—and—*he* came down this morning to tell papa; and I believe we are to be married in the spring.'

'So soon?' I ejaculated, thinking how easily some people's courtships ran.

'Yes,' replied Amy, blushing; 'and he is here this evening, you know, with his cousin, who is staying at Rockledge with him. He talked so much about this cousin, but oh! he is not *half* so nice-looking as himself; and—and—I hope you will like him, Lizzie dear,' kissing me affectionately as she spoke, 'for I have told him so much about you.'

'I am sure I shall, Amy,' I replied as I returned her caress; we were on the staircase at the time, descending to the dining-room. 'I assure you I am quite impatient to see your hero. By-the-bye, dear, what is his name?'

'Armytage.' And then, seeing my blank look of amazement, she repeated it—'Armytage. Have you never heard the name before? I think it's such a pretty one. Amy Armytage,' she whis-

pered finally in my ear, as, laughing merrily, she pushed me before her into the dining-room.

It was all done so suddenly that I had no time to think about it, for before the echo of her words had died away, I was in the midst of the family group, being warmly kissed by Mrs Rodwell, and Mattie, and Nelly, and Lotty, and shaken hands with by the dear, kind old doctor, and his rough school-boys.

'Well, Lizzie dear,' exclaimed my motherly hostess, as she claimed me for a second embrace, 'this is quite an unexpected treat, to have you here to-night; I thought we were never going to see you again. But you look pale, my child; I am afraid you are kept too much in the house. Doctor, what have you been about, not to take better care of Lizzie? You should give her a tonic, or speak to Lady Cunningham on the subject.'

But the good old doctor stuck both his fingers into his ears.

'Now, I'm not going to have any talk about pale looks or physic bottles to-night,' he said; 'the time for doctoring to-day is over. Miss Lizzie, you just come and sit between Tom and me, and we'll give you something that will

beat all the tonics that were ever invented. Here, Mattie, pass the scones and oatcakes down this way, will you? If you children think you are going to keep all the good things up at your end of the table, you are very much mistaken,' and with no gentle touch my hospitable friend nearly pulled me down into his own lap.

'Now, doctor!' exclaimed Mrs Rodwell, with an affectation of annoyance, 'I will not have you treat my guests in this way. Lizzie has come to see *me*, not *you*, and she sits by no side but mine. Besides, you have not even given me time to introduce the gentlemen to her. Lizzie, my dear, we must all be friends here this evening. Mr Bruce Armytage, Mr Frederick Armytage — Miss Lacy. And now, doctor, we'll go to tea as soon as you please.'

I had known from the moment of my entering the room that there were strangers in it, but I had not dared to glance their way. Amy's announcement of her lover's name had come too unexpectedly to permit me to form any fixed idea upon the subject, excepting that it was the same as mine had borne, and yet, when Mrs Rodwell repeated it with the familiar prefix, strange to say, I seemed to hear it with

no second shock, but to have known the bitter truth all along.

Not so, however, Bruce Armytage; for Mrs Rodwell's introduction was scarcely concluded before I heard his voice (unforgotten through the lapse of years) exclaim, 'Miss Lacy!' in a tone of surprise, which could not but be patent to all.

Cold and pulseless as I had felt before, the mere tones of his voice sent the blood rushing from my heart to my head, till the room and the tea-table and the group of living figures swam before my dazzled eyes. I felt my weakness, but I determined all the more that no one else should guess at it, and mentally stamped upon my heart to make it steady against the moment when its energies should be required.

'You have met Mr Armytage before, Lizzie?' said Mrs Rodwell, with a pleasant astonishment.

Then I lifted my eyes and looked at him. Good God! What is the vital force of this feeling, called love, which Thou hast given to us, far oftener to prove a curse than a blessing, that after years of separation, coldness, and neglect, it has the strength to spring up again, warm and passionate as ever, at the sight of a face,

the tone of a voice, or the touch of a hand? Has nothing the power to trample life out of it? Will it always revive when we think it most dead, and turn its pale mutilated features up to the glare of day? Shall our mortal dust, even when coffined in the mould, stir and groan and vainly strive to make itself heard, as the step of one whom we have loved passes sorrowfully over the fresh grass beneath which we lie?

I lifted up my eyes, and looked upon Bruce Armytage, to be able to say truly if I had met him before. Yes, it was he, but little altered during our five years of separation, excepting that he had passed from a boy to a man. He coloured vividly beneath my steady gaze; for a moment I thought he was about to seize my hand, but my eyes forbade him, and he shrank backward.

'Mr Armytage and I *have* met before,' I said, with a marvellous quietness, in answer to Mrs Rodwell's previous question—'when I was living in my old home at Fairmead; but that is so many years ago that we are nothing but strangers to each other now.'

At these words any purpose which he might have entertained of claiming me as

an old acquaintance evidently died out of Bruce Armytage's mind; for, retreating a few paces, he bowed coldly to me, and took a seat, where his proper place now was, by Amy's side.

'Oh, not strangers, my dear—oh no!' exclaimed Mrs Rodwell, who had taken my answer in its literal sense. 'You must all be friends together here, you know, if it is only for Amy's sake. Mr Frederick Armytage, will you be so kind as to pass the muffins up this way? Thank you! Now, Lizzie, my dear, you must make a good tea.'

I sat down between my host and hostess, triumphant on the subject of the manner in which I had acquitted myself, and feeling strong enough for any future trial; but before many minutes had elapsed I was overtaken by a sickly and oppressive sensation for which I was quite unable to account. The hot flush which had risen to my face whilst speaking to Bruce Armytage died away, leaving a cold, leaden weight upon my breast instead; my pulses ceased their quick leap and took to trembling; the rich dainties which the doctor and his wife heaped upon my plate nauseated me even to contemplate; and a whirring confusion commenced in my head,

which obliged me to rally all my forces before I could answer a simple question. The noise and laughter of the tea-table seemed to increase every minute; and if one might judge from the incessant giggling of Amy, Mattie, Nelly, and Lotty, the two gentlemen at the other end were making themselves very agreeable. I tried to eat; I tried to force the buttered toast and plum cake and rich preserves down my throat, but there was something there which utterly prevented my swallowing them.

'Lizzie, my dear, are you not well?' inquired Mrs Rodwell, presently. The friendly interrogation saved me. I had just been relapsing into a state of weakness which might have resulted in hysteria: her words recalled me to myself. Should all the table know that I was grieving? Or rather should he—he who had deserted me, and had forsworn himself, who now sat by the side of his newly betrothed—guess that his presence had the slightest power to affect me? Good heavens! where was my pride? where the contempt which I had hoped to have an opportunity of showing for him? I almost sprang from my chair at the thought.

'Not well, dear Mrs Rodwell!' I ex-

claimed, speaking as fast and as shrilly as people generally do under the circumstances ; 'why, what can make you think so ? I never felt better in my life. But, really, you do so oppress me with good things that it is quite impossible I can do justice to them all, and talk at the same time. No, doctor, not another piece of cake. I couldn't, really ; thank you all the same. You know there is a limit to all things, though you never seem to think so where I am concerned.'

Whilst my voice thus rang out, harshly and unnaturally, across the table, I felt the dark eyes of Bruce Armytage were regarding me from the other end, and I wished I had the courage to stare him down, but I had not. By-and-by, however, when he was again engaged in conversation, I tried to let my eyes rove in his direction, as though I were an uninterested hearer, but the moment that they reached him, he raised his own as if by intuition, and my lids dropped again. I hated myself for this indecision, though I felt it was but nervousness, and that were we alone together but for five minutes I should have strength of mind to look him in the face, and tell him what I thought of his behaviour. As it was,

however, it was a great relief to me when the doctor gave the order to march, and the whole party adjourned to the drawing-room. As soon as we had entered it, Amy left her lover's side and flew to mine.'

'Oh, Lizzie,' she whispered as we sat in a corner together, 'do tell me what you think of him! I am dying to hear. Is he not very handsome?'

'Very handsome,' I answered with closed lips.

'Much better looking than his cousin?'

'Yes, certainly; there is no comparison between them,' which was true, inasmuch as Frederick Armytage, with his fair hair and blue eyes, was a washed-out, sickly-looking creature by the side of his dark, stalwart cousin Bruce.

'I knew you would say so, Lizzie; I was sure you would agree with me. But just fancy your having met Bruce before! Where was it, and when? I couldn't ask you a lot of questions at tea-time, but you made me so curious.'

'Amy,' I said suddenly, for I felt this was a subject on which she must not be inquisitive, 'when I knew Mr Bruce Armytage, I was living at home with my dear father and mother at Fairmead, and you must be aware that an allusion to

those days cannot be a pleasant allusion to me. So, please, like a dear girl, don't ask me any more questions about it, or let me remember that I ever saw your friend before I met him here to-night.'

'I won't,' said Amy, submissively. 'Poor, dear Lizzie!' and she stroked my hand with her soft little palm.

'And do not mention me to him, either. Our acquaintance was but a brief one: he can have no interest left in the matter.'

'Oh, but he has though, Lizzie,' with a shy upward glance. 'He was talking about you all tea-time; his cousin and I thought he would never stop. He asked where you were, and what you were doing, and seemed so sorry when I told him of Lady Cunningham, and what a cross old thing she is, and said several times that he could not get over the surprise of having met you here to-night.'

'Indeed! He has a more retentive memory than I have; you can tell him so next time he speaks of me.' I answered so haughtily that little Amy looked timidly up in my face, and I remembered suddenly that I was speaking of her lover. 'There is your mamma beckoning to you, Amy; and Mattie and Tom are clearing away the chairs and tables. I suppose they want a

dance. Tell them I shall be charmed to play for them;' and then, seeing that Bruce Armytage was crossing the room with a view to seeking Amy, I quickly left my seat, and taking possession of the music-stool, commenced to rattle of a polka. Soon they were all busily engaged in dancing, and the noise occasioned by their feet and voices almost prevented my hearing the conversation which Mrs Rodwell, who had taken up a station with her knitting close to the piano, addressed to me.

'You were very much surprised to hear our news, Lizzie, I'm sure,' she began, as she bent toward my ear.

'Very much surprised, Mrs Rodwell—never more so.'

'Ah!' with a sigh, 'dear Amy is full young—only eighteen last October, you know, Lizzie; but I think she'll be happy. I'm sure I trust so. He is a very steady young man, and they are to live in Rockledge, which is a great comfort to me.'

'In Rockledge!' Was I to undergo the pain of continual intercourse with him, or the alternative of quitting my present situation? 'Did I hear you rightly, Mrs Rodwell?'

'Yes, my dear. His papa, who appears to be a very pleasant old gentleman, has

decided to set him up in an office here, that Amy may not be separated from her family. So thoughtful of him, Lizzie, is it not?'

'Very!' I remembered the pleasant old gentleman's conduct on a similar occasion more immediately concerning myself, and could scarcely trust my voice to answer her.

'You have heard that Mr Armytage is in the law, have you not?' I nodded my head: I had heard it. 'A nice profession —so gentlemanly; and he is a fine-looking young man too; don't you think so? I have heard that some people prefer his cousin's looks to his; but beauty is such a matter of taste, and Amy is quite satisfied on the subject. You may stop playing now, my dear, for they have all done dancing. Nelly, child, how hot you are! Come away at once from the draught of the door.'

'A waltz, a waltz, Lizzie!' they all shouted as they surrounded the piano.

'Perhaps Miss Lacy is tired,' suggested the deep voice of Bruce Armytage. I had been going to plead for a brief respite, but at that sound the desire for repose fled, and without a look in his direction I returned to the instrument and began to play the dance they had asked for. But I had

not been so occupied long before I became aware that some one amongst them continued to hover about the piano, and felt by intuition that it was Bruce Armytage. At that discovery my fingers flew faster and more gaily, and I regarded the notes before me with a fixed smile, whilst, in order to keep up my courage, I kept repeating to myself: 'He deserted me: he left me for no fault of mine. My father and mother died, and he never came near me in my sorrow. He is fickle, base, dishonourable—unworthy of regard.' I tried to set the notes of the waltz that I was playing to the words, 'Fickle, base, dishonourable!' but they refused to be so matched, and only seemed to repeat instead, 'I loved him, I loved him, I loved him!' and then a blurred mist came before my eyes, and I had to play from memory; for Bruce Armytage had taken up his station at the back of the piano and was looking me full in the face.

'It is a long time since we met, Miss Lacy,' he remarked presently, but in so low a voice that had my hearing not been sharpened by anger at his daring to address me, I do not think I should have caught the words.

'Do you think so?' I answered care-

lessly, for I felt that I must say something.

'How can you ask? Have the last five years passed so pleasantly as to leave no evidence of the flight of time?'

'Considering,' I replied, panting with indignation at what appeared to me such thorough indifference to my feelings, 'considering, Mr Armytage, that during the years you speak of I have lost both my dear parents, I should think you might have spared me the allusion.'

'Forgive me. I did not mean to wound you. But if the loss of your parents is the only loss you have to regret during those five years, you are happier than some, Miss Lacy. Death is natural, but there are griefs (the loss of love and hope, for instance) almost too unnatural to be borne.'

How dared he, how dared he—he who had treated me in so cruel and unnatural a manner himself, who had but just plighted his faith afresh to my friend—quietly stand there, looking me in the face with his dark, searching eyes, and taunt me with the barrenness of the life which he had made sterile? Much as I had loved him—much as I feared I loved him still—I could have stood up at that moment and denounced him to them all as a traitor and a coward.

But I thought of Amy, dear little innocent, confiding Amy, and I was silent.

'*I* have not lost them,' I answered him, quietly. 'Therefore I cannot sympathise with your allusion. The death of my dear parents was more than sufficient trouble for me; all else of solace that this world can give me is mine.'

'Do you mean to tell me—' he commenced quickly.

'I mean to tell nothing,' I replied in the same cold tones. 'I am not in the habit of discussing my private affairs with strangers. Had you not better go to Amy? I see that she is sitting out this dance.'

Upon which he gravely inclined his head in acquiescence, and left me to myself.

'Lizzie, Lizzie, how fast you have been playing! We are all out of breath,' exclaimed Mattie, as she and Tom danced up to my side. 'Get up, there's a good girl, and let me take your place; we are going to have a game of "Magical Music." Tom, will you go out first? That's right; now, girls, what shall we hide? Oh, papa's keys; they will do, and then, if he wants them, he will take quite an interest in coming and joining in the game himself.'

I resigned my seat, and stole a hasty glance at the other end of the room. Mrs

Rodwell was busily engaged upon her knitting, and Bruce was sitting on an ottoman close by Amy's side; so, gasping for fresh air and one moment's solitude, and unperceived by the laughing group of children, I left the apartment and ran hastily up to the bedroom which I had first entered. The gas was lighted there, and the fire burned warmly on the hearth, but in my present state of feeling neither warmth nor light was what I most desired. I felt as though I were choking—as though, if no relief were at hand, I must scream aloud, or dash my head against the wall, for my nerves were overstrung, and the demon of hysteria was gaining strength with every minute, and I almost feared would win the victory. But pride came to my assistance—that mighty supporter of human weakness—and flying to the window, I raised the sash and leaned my head out of it, drinking in deep draughts of the foggy night air. And as I did so, watching the bustle in the street below, and the calm stars in the sky above, I felt strength return to me,—strength, not to avoid suffering, but to suffer in patience. The tears rose to my eyes and fell quietly over my cheeks, and as they fell they seemed to dissolve the hard, dry lump which had settled

in my throat and threatened to deprive me of breath. I thought of Bruce Armytage as I had known him in the past, and my tears fell fast for the loss I had sustained in him; but I thought of him also as I saw him in the present, and pride and jealousy made me dash them from my eyes, and resolve that if I died—yes, if I died of grief and love and longing combined—he should never have the gratification of knowing that I had retained one particle of my old affection for him. With which intent I hurried on my walking things, determined not to expose myself any longer to the danger of betrayal; but before I had finished doing so, Mrs Rodwell was in the room, all anxiety to know what had occasioned my sudden absence.

'What is the matter, Lizzie? Did you feel the heat of the room? Why, my dear child, you are never going! It is only just nine o'clock.'

'Yes, dear Mrs Rodwell, I think I had better do so. Lady Cunningham will not be late to-night, and you know how particular she is about my being home before her. Please let me go.'

'Well, dear, it must not be so long again before we see you. We must try and get up a few parties this winter, as it will be Amy's

last in the home circle. And mind, Lizzie, you are to be one of her bridesmaids; she insists upon it.'

'Ah! She is very kind, as you all are, but we will talk of that when the time comes. Good-night, dear Mrs Rodwell. Kiss the girls for me. I won't go into the drawing-room, such a figure as I am.'

But Mrs Rodwell accompanied me down the stairs, conversing as she went.

'I am sorry the doctor is from home, my dear; he would have seen you round to Northampton Lodge; but he is never to be depended on from one hour to another, you know.'

'Oh, it is of no consequence, Mrs Rodwell; I am used to going alone.'

'But I don't half like your doing it, Lizzie: the night is so very dark, and—'

'Allow me to have the pleasure of accompanying Miss Lacy, Mrs Rodwell,' said the voice of Bruce Armytage. We had reached the drawing-room floor by that time, and he stood on the threshold of the open door.

'No, no!' I exclaimed, as I shrank backward; 'I do not desire it—I would rather go alone;' and with a hasty kiss on Mrs Rodwell's cheek, I ran down the remaining stairs and out at the hall door.

The wind was blowing fresh and cold as I turned into the open air, and the night was very dark, but I thought of nothing but his offer to accompany me, and I hurried onward. Did he wish to add insult to injury?

But I had not gone far when I heard the sound of footsteps running after me; and I had hardly realised it was indeed himself before he was by my side, apologising for his presence by the excuse that Mrs Rodwell had desired him to overtake me and see me home. Would I forgive what might otherwise seem an intrusion to me? I was too indignant to vouchsafe him any answer.

We walked on in silence side by side for several minutes, I with my head bent down and holding my thick cloak around me, and he vainly endeavouring to look me in the face. At last, as though making a great effort, he cleared his throat, and said,—

'I suppose, after the manner in which you spoke to me at the piano this evening, my pride ought to forbid my attempting any further explanation with you, but in this case I have one feeling more powerful than pride, Miss Lacy, and I must ask you what you meant by saying that all

that this world could give of solace was yours?'

'I meant what I said,' I answered abruptly, 'or rather, that I require no pity from you or any other stranger. Our paths in life are widely enough divided now: let each walk in his own track, without interfering with the other.'

'That is easier said than done, perhaps,' he replied; 'it is difficult in this world for people to forget what they have been.'

'It does not appear so to me.'

'Ah, perhaps you are differently, more happily, constituted than most. They told me so long ago, though I did not believe them. Will you consider an old friend impertinent for asking if that from which you derive your solace now is the same from which you derived it then? and if so, why I still find you unsettled in life?'

'You are speaking in riddles,' I replied. 'I do not understand you.'

'Your present engagement—is it the same which separated us? Do not be afraid to tell me the truth, Lizzie. I have borne a good deal in my lifetime, and am proof against suffering.'

His voice was so tender and kind, so much like the voice which I remembered

in the old days of our love, that it won me to listen to him quietly.

'My engagement!' I echoed in surprise. 'What are you talking of? I have never been engaged—never since'—and then I halted, fearing what my revelation might suggest to him.

'What do you tell me?' he exclaimed. 'What object have you in deceiving me? Were you not engaged, even before your parents' death, to young Hassell, of Fairmead, and was it not by his father's means that your present situation was procured for you? I little thought to meet you here,' he added bitterly. 'I imagined you were married long ago, or I should have been more careful of my own feelings. And now you are engaged for the third time! How easily life runs for some people!'

'Who could have told you such a falsehood?' I said, turning to him. 'It is true that old Mr Hassell stood my friend when I had not one in the world, and that he found my present situation for me; but as to being engaged to his son, why, he is a married man—he married my own cousin.'

'Could the mistake have arisen so?' said Bruce Armytage, as he seized my

hand. 'Oh, Lizzie, do not be angry; think what I have gone through! When I returned home from that wretched foreign tour, during which I was not allowed to correspond with you, the first news which I heard from my own family was, that your father and mother had died some eighteen months before, and that you were engaged to Robert Hassell, and living with some old lady (no one could tell me where) until the time for your marriage arrived. I would not believe them; I rushed down to Fairmead myself to make inquiries, and reached there on the very day of young Hassell's wedding with Miss Lacy. Do you think I was a coward not to stop and see the bride, believing her to be yourself? Perhaps I was; but I flew from the spot as though I had been haunted; and I suffered—ah, Lizzie, I cannot tell how much! It is so fearful, so awful a thing to teach one's self to believe the heart in which we have trusted to be faithless and unworthy.'

'I know it,' I said in a low voice, which was nearly choked by my tears.

'How I have lived since that time I can hardly tell you,' he continued as he pressed my hand. (I knew it ought not to remain in his, but it was so sweet to feel it there.)

'I have had very little hope, or peace, or happiness, though I have struggled on through it all, and made myself a name in my profession. And then to meet you again to-night so unexpectedly, still free, but promised to another, myself and my love so evidently forgotten, and to feel that it has been but a chance that separated us! Oh! Lizzie, it is almost harder than it was at first!'

'I am not engaged,' I answered, sobbing; 'you choose to take my words at the piano as meaning so, but it was your mistake, not mine. I have lived much in the manner you describe yourself to have done—not very happily, perhaps, and finding my best relief in work. But I am glad to have met you, Bruce—glad to have heard from your own lips what parted us; and I thank you for this explanation, though it comes too late.'

'But why too late, my dearest?' he exclaimed joyfully. 'Why, if you are free to accept my hand, and can forgive all that has made us so unhappy in the past, should we not bury our mutual trouble in mutual love? Oh, Lizzie, say that you'll be mine—say that you'll be my own wife, and help me to wipe out the remembrance of this miserable mistake!'

I thought of Amy. I looked at him with astonishment; I recoiled from him almost with disgust. Was I to accept happiness at the expense of that of my dear friends, of the only creatures who had shown me any affection during my long years of exile from him? Oh no. I would rather perish in my solitude. The very fact that he could propose it to me made him sink lower in my estimation.

'Bruce,' I exclaimed, 'you must be mad, or I am mad so to tempt you from your duty. Think of all your offer involves—of the distress, the disappointment, the shame it would entail on those who have been more than friends to me; and consider if it is likely I could be so dishonourable to them as to take advantage of it.'

'I don't understand you, my darling,' he said, with a puzzled look.

'Not understand?' I reiterated, in surprise, 'when your engagement to Amy Rodwell was only settled this morning, and the preliminaries for your marriage are already being talked of! Would you break her heart in the attempt to heal mine? Bruce, we must never see each other again after this evening.'

'Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie!' he said, shaking

his head, 'we are playing at dreadful cross-purposes. Did it never enter into your wise little pate to inquire *which* Mr Armytage was going to marry Amy Rodwell? I can assure you I have no desire or intention to risk getting a pistol-shot through my heart for stepping into my cousin Frederick's shoes.'

'And is it really—is it really, then, *Frederick* whom she is going to marry?' I exclaimed, breathless with the shock of this new intelligence. 'Oh, how can she?'

'It is indeed,' he answered, laughing. 'Lizzie, did you seriously think that it was I? Why, what a taste you must give me credit for, to choose that pretty little piece of white-and-pink china, after having had the chance of such a woman as yourself! And now, what is my answer?'

What it was I leave for my readers to guess. Let those who have thirsted until life's blood lay as dry dust in their veins, thrust the chalice of sparkling wine from their parched lips if they will: I am not made of such stern stuff as that.

THE END.

LEOPOLD-FERDINAND, DUC DE BRABANT.

THE death of a child is at all times a subject of mournful interest: it is so sad to see the hereditary curse falling on the innocent heads of those who in themselves have done nothing to merit the punishment of sin. But when the lost child is an only child, or an only son, our sympathies with the bereavement are increased tenfold; so proud do we know each other to be, of perpetuating the frailties of which we are but too conscious, and leaving behind us an inheritor of the misery we have endured. And if ordinary children (of which a few hundreds more or less in the world make little difference) are to be thus bewailed, what words can paint strongly enough the

condolence with which we should approach the subject of that royal parent who so lately lost at one stroke his only son, and (in the direct line) the sole heir to his throne! The interest felt by all Englishmen in the royal family of Belgium lies deeper than in the mere fact of their near connection with our own Sovereign and her lamented consort. From the time that the first Leopold came over, a gallant bridegroom, to our shores, to wed the Princess Charlotte (that darling of the nation), and left them so shortly afterwards widowed and childless, we have taken almost as keen an interest in all that concerned him and his children as though death had never stepped in to sever the link between us. And this feeling has been warmly kept up as much by the condescension with which Leopold II. has followed in the footsteps of his father, by taking an interest in all things British, and showing the utmost courtesy to, and consideration for, the foreigners of that nation residing in his dominions, as by the intimate relations maintained between the royal families of England and Belgium.

It may be said, then, and without exaggeration, that when the sad news that the young Duc de Brabant had at last suc-

cumbed to the cruel malady which had kept him in constant suffering, and the nation's hopes in a state of fluctuation for nine months past, was disseminated throughout Brussels, his royal parents received as much sympathy in their sorrow from the English residents in that capital as from their own people. The Belgians mourned their future king; but we wept with the father and mother over the cradle of their only son.

The loss was not an ordinary one, for the child was not an ordinary child; and this assertion is made, not from newspaper gleanings, but the report of those who knew him intimately. His photograph confirms this fact; for the calm, sensible face depicted there has none of the careless, laughter-loving expression which characterises his age; although when in health the Duc de Brabant is said to have been as playful and merry as other little children. But sickness came too soon to rob his features of all but the serene patience which became habitual to them, and before any change could arrive to restore their original expression he has passed away from amongst us, and nothing remains to recall his memory but the few words which can be written of so innocent and uneventful a life.

Leopold-Ferdinand-Elie-Victor-Albert-Marie, Duc de Brabant, Comte de Hainaut, and Duc de Saxe, was born at the palace of Laeken, on the 12th of June 1859. He was the second child of his parents, after ten years of wedded life, consequently his birth was hailed with all the greater acclamation for fulfilling hope deferred to the hearts of his people. When born, he had every appearance of possessing a robust constitution, being plump and well made, with broad shoulders and an open chest; with a formation, in fact, containing the promise of so much muscular strength, that the obstinate ravages of the fatal disease which has taken him from us have been a matter of surprise to all who knew the child as he once was.

The method of his bringing up, also, and the careful manner in which his studies and employments were regulated, should have tended to increase, rather than detract from, the bodily health which he bid fair to enjoy. His education, entrusted to M. le Comte Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz, and to Monsieur le Lieutenant Donny, was skilfully directed in such a way as to maintain a wholesome equilibrium between the development of his physical force and that of the brilliant mental faculties with which

the young prince was gifted. The employment of his time was carved out with the greatest minuteness, and out-door exercises alternated with mental labour so as to procure for both mind and body the repose they needed. The prince invariably left his bed at six in summer, and seven in winter, and breakfasted an hour after he rose; when he worked with his tutor till ten o'clock. A run in the park or a ride on his pony served him for recreation; and at one he joined his father and mother at luncheon—a meal which the king and queen always took *en famille*. Before resuming his studies, the little prince went out again with his tutor, dined at six, and was then at liberty to amuse himself until his bedtime, which was fixed for eight o'clock. Such a life could hurt no one: no enforced studies were exacted from his tender brain, nor was the heir of Belgium sacrificed to the desire to see him turn out a prodigy; he lived as other happy and well-cared-for children live, making his short life one long holiday; and, until within ten months of his decease, showed no symptoms whatever of ill-health.

Then the first signs of sickness, said to be consequent on the suppression of some childish disorder, became apparent, and

increased until they culminated in pericarditis, or inflammation of the membranes of the heart, the affection which ultimately destroyed him. At its commencement, this complaint had all the appearance of a heavy cold, accompanied by a dry, violent cough, which was soon followed by a pallid face and wasted figure, the sure signs of impoverished blood.

When the first grave consultation had confirmed the diagnostic of the attendant physicians, that the pericardium or membrane of the heart was affected, all the efforts of science were immediately put in requisition to arrest the progress of the evil; but without avail, for they proved powerless to stay the rapid decline of his natural powers, by dropsy, the usual effect of heart disease. The swelling of the stomach and chest of the poor little invalid now became enormous; the respiratory organs no longer performed their office, and the cough redoubled in intensity. It became most distressing, scarcely ceasing day or night; and the gravest fears began to be entertained for his lungs. The apartments of the prince, though large and airy, and situated on the ground floor of the right wing of the palace of Laeken, and opening on the park, did not contain sufficient vital

air for his need. When it was necessary to close the windows of the chamber, which was only done at night (for the suffering child found no relief except in a free current of air), servants placed on either side his bed kept up a continual fanning, and by that means occasionally gained him a few moments of repose. Every morning, under the guardianship of his tutor, Monsieur Donny, the prince was taken into the park in a little pony-carriage led by a groom, and made the tour of the domain four or five times. Towards the middle of the journey the pony and servant were changed, for the promenade was long, and often occupied several hours; and, occasionally, the poor father and mother, so soon to be bereaved, might be seen following on horseback, and wistfully regarding the little carriage which held the object of their dearest hopes. It was a *triste* and melancholy procession, and resembled a funeral *cortége* more than anything else.

Towards one o'clock the prince would stop, generally near the aviary of pheasants, and lunch with his preceptor; for, strange to say, his appetite, though feeble, never abandoned him until the very last. Soon the carriage was again in motion and making the circuit of the park, for it was only

by a continual change of air that the poor child was enabled to breathe with any ease. The affection of the prince for Monsieur Donny was incredible. Throughout his illness he insisted upon his being continually at his side, would not take his meals without him, and obliged him to sleep in his apartments; and Monsieur Donny (although he had been married but a few weeks when the first serious symptoms of illness appeared) never quitted the royal child for a moment until he was carried out of the palace of Laeken for the last time. About the month of October there appeared to be some amelioration in the prince's condition, and hopes were almost confidently entertained of his ultimate restoration to health. But these hopes were of short duration, although the bulletins, issued daily, fluctuated so much in their statements that it was difficult to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. The king is said to have had no hope from the commencement of the disorder, and his despair was proportionately great. His grief was so profound that he became a mere shadow of himself; and yet, with that manly fortitude which resists an open expression of what it feels, might be seen at all times, pacing the palace and gardens of Laeken

with calm dry eyes, but a fixed, mournful look, which seemed as though he had always before him a vision of the pitiless death which was about to strike him in his tenderest affections.

At night he would constantly rise from his own bed to go with bare feet and noiseless step, and hang over the couch where his child, with angelic patience, was awaiting his doom. This patience, so calm as to appear almost unnatural, and which excites surprise in those who have not nursed little children through mortal illnesses, seems to have been a characteristic of this little child. Numberless anecdotes have, of course, been related of him during the last months, many of which are totally without foundation, but one in particular was so widely spread that it gained general credence. It was the fact of his feigning sleep when suffering great pain if he heard the approach of his father's footstep, lest he should be questioned relative to his state, and read the disappointment his answer must have caused. 'If I pretend to sleep,' he used to say to his attendants, 'my father will think that I am better.'

But during the daytime his father was seldom absent from his side, and was

never weary of trying to extract some slight support on which to hang hope by questioning the child as to his feelings and symptoms. One day, when the little tragedy was drawing very near its close, and the prince was suffering from one of those attacks which so often threatened to be fatal, the king approached the bed to learn some news of his condition, and receiving, for the first time, no reply save such as was conveyed by the languid, half-raised eyes.

'Je vous ennuie, n'est ce pas, mon enfant!' he exclaimed; and unable to control his feelings, rushed away into the park in order to conceal them.

On Christmas-day the king, in an attempt, if possible, to distract the child's mind, had a large Christmas-tree set up in the midst of his apartment, made brilliant with wax tapers, and hung with numbers of beautiful playthings and other ornaments calculated to attract one of his age.

The Duc de Brabant, after having duly admired the tree and its belongings, and appearing to take pleasure in examining and handling the playthings with which it was laden, asked his attendants to bring a large box to his bedside; and having

seen all his presents packed away in it, gave it to Doctor Henriette (one of his attendant physicians), and begged him to distribute its contents amongst the little invalids in the hospital. This is but one trait amongst a thousand from which might have been predicated what sort of king this child, if spared, would eventually have made. He was positively adored by the people of the royal household—those servants who were under his control; and by seeing him play at sovereign with whom one read the natural nobility of his yet undeveloped character. When any of his servants had committed a fault and deserved a reprimand from the officer on duty, the Duc de Brabant would accuse himself of the negligence in order to save the real offender from punishment. He was nursed throughout his illness by two Sœurs de Charité, who paid him the utmost attention, and of whom he became proportionately fond. It was said that on the first of January the Duc de Brabant asked his father for the sum of six thousand francs: 'Pour ces deux anges qui me veillaient.' This anecdote was afterwards contradicted; but it possesses at least the merit of giving the general idea of the disposition of Leopold-Ferdinand. His

was the most generous little heart possible, and he would have despoiled himself of everything to make one creature happy.

On Thursday evening, the twenty-first of January, when it became known in Laeken that the prince was really dying, the whole community was in commotion; and when towards nine o'clock the report was spread that all was over, nothing was to be seen but mournful and downcast countenances, and the commissioner of police was forced to reassure the people by telling them that the child still lived. These sentiments were but natural, for the progress of the disease had been suspended during so many months that the dangerous state of the royal invalid was but thoroughly realised. The public had begun to think that the doctors must be mistaken in their diagnostics; and thus, when the bulletins from the palace intimated that there was a fatal aggravation of the symptoms, the news could not fail to throw the whole country into a state of consternation. The last agony of the unfortunate child (whose sufferings had been greatly accelerated ever since the fourteenth of January) commenced at five in the evening of the twenty-first, and did not terminate till forty minutes past twelve, at which time he drew

his last breath in a long sigh of relief. MM. Henriette and Wimmer, who had so assiduously tended the royal child since the appearance of the disease to which he succumbed, were summoned to the palace of Laeken by a despatch from M. le Comte Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz a few minutes after the last crisis had commenced, and did not again quit the bedside of the invalid, though they had the grief of seeing all their science powerless to do more than assist at the last moments of him whose life but a few months before they had hoped to save.

From the time the crisis set in, Prince Leopold-Ferdinand recognised no one, although his intelligence was not completely obscured; for when the king or queen spoke to him, he appeared to understand what they said, although it was impossible for him to respond, even by a gesture, to the loving words which were lavished upon him. He died, as so beloved a child should die, between his father and mother, who, during the last hours, never quitted his side. In his chamber at this time were Madame la Duchesse d'Ursel, mistress of the queen's household; Monsieur le Comte Vanderstraeten-Ponthoz, maréchal of the palace;

Monsieur Donny, the prince's preceptor; MM. Henriette and Wimmer, the two Sœurs de Charité who had nursed him through his illness, and the two *valets-de-chambre* of the Duc de Brabant. All were silent, as, awe-stricken, they waited, in the midst of that calm night, to hear the rustling wings of the Angel of Death; and the peaceful solemnity of the last hour was undisturbed, save by the voice of the chaplain who recited the prayers for the dying. Monseigneur le Comte de Flandre, brother to the king, who had been summoned to the palace by the same despatch which had brought MM. Henriette and Wimmer, arrived there at half-past ten, and quitted Laeken again at midnight; he was not, therefore, present at the last moments of his nephew. It was the same with Monsieur Devaux, the king's secretary, who retired at half-past nine to his own apartments.

When all was over, and life had finally quitted the poor little body which had suffered so much, the father and mother, one after another, strained the corpse in their arms, and covered it with kisses, until the king, desirous of sparing the queen so mournful a spectacle, led her by force from the couch where rested the inanimate re-

mains of the sole heir to their crown. On the morning following his decease the body of the little prince was completely robed in white, and placed on the bed in the chamber where he had died, and which is next to that in which his grandfather, Leopold I., drew his last breath. A crown of white roses, fresh and pure as his own brief life, was placed on the pillar immediately above his head, and a little virgin, with several playthings with which he had essayed to wile away some of the weary hours of pain, were placed at the foot of his couch. An altar was improvised on a large chest of drawers, placed between two windows of his bedroom, where a crucifix hung in the midst of lighted candles, converting the chamber of death into a temporary chapel. Here the Sœurs de Charité watched the dead child through the night, as they had watched him for so many previous months.

The body of the little prince was not embalmed, as the queen steadfastly set her face against such a proceeding, but was interred in the same condition in which he had died. The corpse was not at all decomposed, but it was terribly thin. The face wore the pallor of marble, and was not at all swollen or otherwise disfigured. The

child appeared to sleep, and so he did, although the sleep will be eternal. On the same day the following proclamation was placed on the walls of the capital :—

'Aux Habitants de Bruxelles.

'Concitoyens,—Le pays vient d'éprouver une perte immense. Le Prince Royal a succombé cette nuit au mal cruel qui menaçait depuis longtemps une existence si précieuse à tous les Belges. La population de Bruxelles, fidèle aux sentiments inaltérables qu'elle a voués à une dynastie bien-aimée pleurera longtemps le jeune Prince dont elle avait entouré le berçeau de tant d amour et de si chères espérances.

'Fait à l'Hôtel de Ville, le 22 Janvier, 1869.

'Par le Collége, le Secrétaire, 'Le Collége,

'A. Lacomble. Jules Anspach.'

The following letter of condolence, addressed by the permanent deputation of the Provincial Council of Brabant, to their bereaved king and queen, appears to me so touchingly worded, thatI give it in the original, fearful of spoiling by translating it :—

'Sire, Madame,—Il a plu à la Providence de nous envoyer au milieu de nos

prospérités, une bien douloureuse épreuve. Le Prince Royal est mort! . . . mort avant d'avoir accompli sa dixième année! . . . Ce coup cruel, que nos vœux n'ont pu conjurer, nous frappe tous au cœur. Il ravit un fils à votre amour, à nous le jeune Prince promis à de hautes et si précieuses destinées. Dans une adversité si grande, nous le savons, toutes les paroles sont vaines. Il y a des afflictiones que rien ne console. Nous pouvons, du moins, mêler la tristesse de nos regrets à l'amertume des vôtres, et, associés à votre légitime douleur, souffrir et pleurer avec vous.

'Oui, pleurons! Mais gardons une entière confiance dans l'avenir! Dieu n'a pas cessé de protéger la Belgique et la dynastie qui lui est inséparablement unie.

'La députation permanente du Conseil Provincial du Brabant.'

After which followed the signatures of the president and those members of the council who signed the address in the name of the entire body.

But the loyal sympathy of the Belgians did not vent itself in words only. As soon as the death of their young prince was officially announced, black flags on the Belgian colours, smothered in crape, were

displayed from the balconies of the principal houses, whilst the fronts of many of them were completely hung with funereal drapery, and most of the shops and all places of amusement were closed. The ships lying in the Belgian ports lowered their flags half-mast high, in sign of the general mourning; and all the principal families in Brussels, and most of the English residents appeared in black.

The bells of the cathedral and other churches kept tolling at intervals during the first and succeeding days, to announce the melancholy news; all fêtes and public rejoicing were suspended, as well as private balls and concerts; and the ministerial conferences were adjourned.

Meanwhile the body of the young prince, which had been watched ever since his death by the officers of the household, was placed in a triple coffin, lined with white silk, in the presence of the king and queen, the Archbishop of Malines, and several members of the royal household. This melancholy ceremony of bidding the last earthly adieu, is said to have been, as is natural, the occasion of a most heartrending scene. The young prince had received the insignia of the Chevalier de la Toison d'Or d'Espagne, shortly after the ascension of

his father Leopold II. to the throne; and this insignia was placed on his coffin during the funeral obsequies—which were fixed to take place at eleven o'clock on Monday, the twenty-fifth; at which time also was to be performed (according to the rites of the Roman Catholic religion), in the church of Notre-Dame at Laeken, the first funeral mass for the repose of his innocent soul.

Accordingly, before eight o'clock on the morning of the day appointed, a procession of people eager to witness the ceremony lined the road to the church and palace of Laeken. At the palace, the guests were received in the rotunda, where they had to await the arrival of the body, to form themselves in *cortége*. Monsieur le Baron Prisse, adjutant of the Palace, and Monsieur de Wyckersloth were appointed to receive them. Only a very few were admitted into the temporary chapel, where rested the mortal remains of the little prince; and which was most tastefully decorated. The walls and ceiling were draped with black; an altar had been erected between the two windows, before which stood the coffin, supported on a small black bier. It was covered with a white pall, embroidered with a large golden cross, upon which lay a wreath of white

roses. This erection, lighted by four gold candelabra on black pedestals, and a chandelier from the ceiling, under which the coffin rested, had a very solemn and imposing effect. On the black drapery with which the room was hung, were shields emblazoned with the royal arms. At a quarter to eleven the clergy arrived. They consisted of the Archbishop of Malines, the Bishops of Belgium, accompanied by their canons and secretaries; the rectors of the parishes of Laeken and the capital; several envoys from the provinces, and a representative of each of the religious orders now established in Brussels. At their arrival at the palace, which they entered two by two, the principal members of the clergy were admitted into the temporary chapel, where were already assembled H.M. the King; H.R.H. the Comte de Flandre; Monseigneur la Prince de Ligne; and several officers of the household, amongst which was Monsieur Donny, the prince's tutor, who since the morning could not be persuaded to quit the remains of his beloved pupil. After the usual prayers, the coffin was delivered into the hands of some of the non-commissioned officers of the army, and such of the Garde-Civique as had been deputed to carry it to

its last resting-place. The coffin was of black wood, with silver nails and ornaments; lions' heads formed the handles, and a splendid ivory crucifix was on the lid, but there was no plate, descriptive of the name or distinctions of the deceased child.

As soon as the coffin had been placed on the bier on which it was to be carried, the white pall with its golden cross was thrown over it, and the funeral *cortége* was set in motion. The pall was held by MM. les Généraux Chazal and Pletinckx; MM. Frère-Orban, Minister of Finance, and Bara, Minister of Justice; Dolez, President of the Chamber, and Omalius d'Halloy, President of the Senate.

The king, with the Comte de Flandre, headed the procession. He was pale, and appeared sadly changed; his step was slow and faltering, and he was obliged to lean for support on the arm of his royal brother. They were attired in the uniform of lieutenant-generals of the army, and opposite to where they wore the ribbon of the Order of Leopold hung a long black crape scarf. Both seemed much affected, but the father had evidently great trouble in keeping back his tears; and one can well imagine that it must have been real courage on his part to

attend the sad ceremony in person. Immediately after the king and his brother, who walked behind the little coffin, came the officers of the household of the king, queen, and Comte de Flandre; the ambassadors or plenipotentiary ministers of the various Powers, the generals of the army, and several other persons of distinction.

Amongst the representatives of the different Powers were two special envoys: these were M. de Jamund, aide-de-camp of the Prince Royal of Prussia, to represent his Prussian Majesty; and M. Schreckenstein, who did the same for the Prince of Hohenzollern. It was painful to see M. Donny, who formed part of the melancholy procession: his face bore such evident traces of the suffering he had passed through; and when the mortal remains of the little prince passed him in leaving the palace, he burst into tears. This long *cortége* was brought up at the rear by the invited guests and clergy already enumerated, after which came an empty hearse: first an ordinary one, of which the drapery had been exchanged for ornaments of black and gold, and escutcheons, with the Belgian lion placed on each side of the seat; whilst six horses, caparisoned with black,

their heads surmounted with plumes, drew the funeral car. The dead child's little pony, sitting astride which he had been photographed in various positions, covered with crape and led by two grooms, followed the hearse; and twelve court carriages, their lamps enveloped in crape, and their coachmen in deep mourning, came after it. In this order, preceded and followed by troops of horse, as guards of honour, the procession slowly wended its way towards the church by Montagne du Tonnerre. Its departure from the palace was proclaimed by volleys of artillery, which continued throughout the ceremony, and indeed from daybreak canons fired at intervals, had announced the coming solemnity; first, every half-hour, and afterwards, every five minutes. The bells of all the churches, also of the capital and its suburbs did not cease tolling until the funeral obsequies of the young prince were completed. At the gate of the palace a company of Grenadiers presented arms to the coffin, and a little farther on the barrack-guard went through the same ceremony. Along the whole length of the road was assembled a silent crowd: at every window appeared eager and interested faces, amongst whom was a large number of women,—all dressed in

deep mourning, and many weeping. It was reckoned, and without exaggeration, that more than forty thousand people went to Laeken that day to see the child of their king buried. From the palace to the church the *coup d'œil* of the procession was very imposing.

A veil of black seemed to hover over the vast multitude, who, with uncovered heads, paced slowly beneath the wintry sky; and the rays of frosty sunshine, powerless as they were to warm on such a day, had yet sufficient brilliancy to outshine the lights which flickered in a sickly manner in the carriage lamps, overshadowed by their coverings of crape.

When the coffin arrived at the church, it was already nearly filled with the functionaries of the different administrations of Brussels and the provinces. There were also representatives of all the constituted bodies, most of the governors of the province, and deputations of the communal and provincial councils. MM. le Capitaine Nicaise and Lahure, junior, were appointed to keep order in the church; and the places for each body of functionaries were marked beforehand by printed bills. The king and the Comte de Flandre occupied seats in front of the altar; those belonging to

their households sat behind. The diplomatic body was to the right of the bier, on which rested the coffin—the various deputations to the left; and all the rest of the assemblage were disposed in the two aisles of the church.

The building was completely hung with black: each pillar bore an escutcheon, in the centre of which was blazoned a golden lion, surmounted by the word 'Obiit,' and the date of the child's death. The bier, placed in the middle of the church, and at the entrance of the choir, was raised upon a pedestal covered with black velvet, bordered with ermine and embroidered with lions. The bier itself was covered with a white pall, on the top of which was placed a wreath of roses, just like the one which lay upon the coffin whilst in the temporary chapel, and was surmounted by a black canopy bordered with heavy gold fringe, from which fell four large curtains, enveloping the pedestal. Round the coffin burned numerous wax tapers, and on the four panels of this funereal erection, and at each corner of the altar, were the royal arms of Belgium. The Archbishop of Malines was the principal officiator at the ceremony, and it was he who pronounced the Absolution, standing

beneath a canopy of crimson velvet fringed with gold, which had been raised for him, to the right of the altar. The suffragan bishops took a part in the service; but the mass was sung.

Directly it was concluded, the coffin was placed in the chapel in front of the vault where King Leopold I. and Queen Marie-Louise already rest, and there it will remain until the three coffins can be together moved to the permanent vault in course of erection in the new church at Laeken.

Then the king came forward, and, having placed on the coffin of his child a wreath of white flowers, left the church to return to the palace. He was terribly moved, and had difficulty in restraining his tears until he should have regained his carriage.

The Mass for the Dead was then resumed, and lasted for an hour and a-half; and it was two hours before the funeral ceremonies were finally completed.

On the following Wednesday, the church of Ste Gudule and St Michel at Brussels, having been hung in the same lavish manner with black and white, a second Grand Mass was said and sung there for the repose of the little prince's soul; and then the whole business was over, and people began to talk of something else.

But it will be a long time before Belgium forgets her Prince Royal or the bereavement of her king.

The funeral was, perhaps, as grand a one as ever was given for a child, and the decorations of the churches, biers, and coffin, things to be remembered; but the way in which true Belgians will love best to think of Leopold-Ferdinand, Duc de Brabant, will be the recollection, treasured by his father and mother—the recollection of a pure dead face, freed from all suffering and pain, lying on its once familiar bed, a little virgin clasped in the inanimate hand, and a wreath of white roses laid upon the pillow; but above all, of a happy soul freed from the suffering of sin, and in the enjoyment of a kingdom from the possession of which the temptations attendant upon wearing an earthly crown might have debarred him.

THE END.

LITTLE WHITE SOULS.

I AM going to tell you a story which is as improbable an one as you have ever heard. I do not expect anybody to believe it; yet it is perfectly true. The ignorant and bigoted will read it to the end perhaps, and then fling it down with the assertion that it is all nonsense, and there is not one word of truth in it. The wiser and more experienced may say it is very wonderful and incredible, but still they know there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophy. But no one will credit it with a hearty, uncompromising belief. And yet neither ridicule nor incredulity can alter the fact that this is a true history of circumstances that occurred

but a few years since, and to persons who are living at the present time.

The scene is laid in India, and to India, therefore, I must transplant you in order that you may be introduced to the actors in this veracious drama, premising that the names I give, not only of people but of places, are all fictitious.

It is Christmas time in a single station on the frontiers of Bengal, and a very dull Christmas the members of the 145th Bengal Muftis find it in consequence. For to be quartered in a single station means to be compelled to associate with the same people day after day and month after month and year after year; and to carry on that old quarrel with Jones, or to listen to the cackle of Mrs Robinson, or be bored with the twaddle of Major Smith, without any hope of respite or escape, and leaving the gentlemen out of the question, the ladies of the 145th Bengal Muftis are not in the best frame of mind at the time my story opens to spend the day of peace and goodwill towards men together. Regimental ladies seldom are. They are quarrelsome and interfering, and back-biting enough towards each other in an English garrison town, but that is a trifle compared to the way in which they carry

on in our outlying stations in India. And yet, the ladies of the 145th Bengal Muftis are not bad specimens of the sex, taken individually. It is only when they come in contact that their Christian love and charity make themselves conspicuous. Mrs Dunstan, the wife of the colonel, is the most important of them all, and the most important personage, too, in this little story of a misfortune that involved herself, therefore let Mrs Dunstan be the first to advance for inspection.

As we meet her, she is seated in a lounging chair in her own drawing-room, at Mudlianah, with a decided look of discontent or unhappiness upon her countenance. The scene around her would seem fair enough in the eyes of those who were not condemned to live in it. Her room is surrounded by a broad verandah, which is so covered by creepers as to be a bower of greenery. Huge trumpet-shaped blossoms of the most gorgeous hues of purple, scarlet and orange, hang in graceful festoons about the windows and open doorways, whilst the starry jessamine and Cape honeysuckle fill the air with sweetness. Beyond the garden, which is laid out with much taste, though rather in a wild and tangled style, owing to the luxuriance of the vegetation,

lie a range of snowy hills which appear quite close in the transparent atmosphere, although in reality they are many miles away.

Mrs Dunstan's room is furnished, too, with every luxury as befits the room of a colonel's wife, even in an up country station. The chairs and sofas are of carved ebony wood, and cane work from Benares; the table is covered with flowers, books, and fancy work; a handsome piano stands in one corner; the floor is covered with coloured matting, and in the verandah are scattered toys from various countries, a token that this comfortable home does not lack the chief of married joys, a child-angel in the house.

The mistress, too, is still young and still handsome, not wanting the capacity for intellectual nor the health for physical enjoyment, there must be some deeper reason than outward discomfort therefore for that sad far-away look in her eyes and the pain which has knitted her brow. Yes, 'Mees Mar-gie MacQueerk' (as she would style herself) has been giving Mrs Dunstan an an hour of her company that morning, and as usual left her trail behind her.

'Mees Margie' is a tall, quaint, ill-favoured Scotchwoman on the wrong side

of fifty, who has come out to India to keep the house of her brother, the doctor of the 145th. She is a rigid Presbyterian, with a brogue as uncompromising as her doctrine and a judgment as hard as nails. Never having been tempted to do anything wrong, she is excessively virtuous, and has an eye like a hawk for the misdoings of others; indeed, she is so excellent a detective that she discovers the sins before the sinners have quite made up their minds to commit them. She is the detestation of the regiment, and the colonel's wife has been compelled in consequence to show Miss MacQuirk more attention than she would otherwise have done to make up for the neglect of the others. For never does Miss Maggie pass half-an-hour without hinting at a fresh peccadillo on the part of somebody else. She has a rooted conviction that all soldiers are libertines, not fit to be trusted out of sight of their wives or sisters, and if she has no new misdemeanour to relate on the part of the masters, the servants are sure to come in for their share of abuse, and so Miss Maggie MacQuirk manages to find food for scandal all the year round. Ethel Dunstan ought to know her foibles well enough to mistrust her by this time, and

had the doctor's sister come in with some new story of young Freshfield's flirting, on Mr Masterman's card-playing, she would have been as ready as ever to laugh at the old Scotchwoman's mountainous molehills, and to assure her she was utterly mistaken. But Miss MacQuirk's discourse this morning had taken a different turn. She had talked exclusively of the latest arrival in Mudlianah: lovely Mrs Lawless, who has just returned with her husband, Jack Lawless, from staff duty in the North-west Provinces, and how her beauty seemed to have addled the heads of all the men of the 145th Bengal Muftis. And there was a great deal of truth in Miss MacQuirk's assertions, and that is what has made them go home to the heart of Ethel Dunstan. We are all so ready to believe anything that affects our own happiness.

'Deed, and it's jeest freetful,' said Miss Margie, in her provincial twang, 'to see a set o' dunderheids tairned the wrang way for the sake o' a wee bit o' a pasty face wi' two beeg eyes in the meedle o' it. It's eno' to mak' a God-fearing woman praise the Laird that has kept her in the straight path. For I'll no affairm that it's by mee ain doin' that I can haud up my heed the

day with the Queen o' England herself if need be.'

'But Mrs Lawless is very, *very* lovely —there cannot be two opinions on that subject,' cried generous-hearted Mrs Dunstan. 'For my own part I never saw a more beautiful face than hers, and my husband says just the same thing.'

'Eh! I nae doot it! The cairnal's heed is tairned like all the rest o' them. But he cannot ca' it reet that men should rin after a leddy that has a lawfu' meeried husband o' her ain.'

'But you have such strange notions, Miss MacQuirk. If a gentleman shows a lady the least attention you call it "running after her." We are like one family shut up in this little station by ourselves. If we are not to be on friendly terms with each other, we are indeed to be pitied.'

'Friendly tairms,' exclaimed Miss Margie. 'Do you call it "friendly tairms" to be walking in the dairk with anither mon's wife? An' that's jeest what my gude brother saw yester e'en as he was comin' hame fra' mess.'

'What man! whose wife?' asked Ethel Dunstan, for once interested in Miss MacQuirk's scandal.

'Aye! I dinna ken the mon, but the leddy was Mrs Lawless hersel'. And her husband was at the mess the while, for Andrew left him at the table, and he was comin' home in the dark and he saw Mrs Lawless in her gairden at the dead o' neet walkin' with a strange mon—a tall mon, and stout, and not unlike the cairnal, Andrew says.'

'What nonsense; Charlie was back from mess by eleven o'clock,' said Mrs Dunstan, with an air of annoyance. 'When you repeat such stories, Miss MacQuirk, be good enough to keep my husband's name out of them, or you may get into trouble.'

'Ah, well, Mrs Dunstan, I only mentioned that it was like the cairnal. Doubtless he was at mess or at home the while. It was half-past ten when Andrew retairned. But it is hairdly reet that Mrs Lawless should be walking in her gairden at that hour o' neet and with anither mon than her husband. I doot but one should infairm Mr Lawless of the caircumstance.'

'Well, I advise you not to be the one,' replied Ethel Dunstan, tartly. 'Jack Lawless is considered a fire-eater amongst men, and I don't think he would spare the woman even who tried to take away his wife's character.'

'Eh, Mrs Doonstan, who talks o' takin' awa' her character? I doot it's but little she's got, puir thing, and it 'twould be a sin to rob her o' it. But it's a terrible thing to see how gude luiks air rated abuve guid deeds, and enough to mak' all honest men thank the Laird who has presairved them fra the wiles o' the enemy. And now I'll wish you the gude mairnin, Mrs Doonstan, for I have several other calls to pay before tiffin.'

And so the old scandal-monger had left the colonel's wife in the condition in which we found her.

Of course if there had been no more truth in it than in the generality of Miss MacQuirk's stories Ethel Dunstan would have laughed at and forgotten it. But there is just sufficient probability of its being a fact to give a colouring to the matter.

For Mrs Lawless is not a woman that the most faithful husband in creation could look at without some degree of interest, and Colonel Dunstan being guileless of harm, has expressed his admiration of her in the most open manner. She is a graceful, fairy-like creature, of two or three-and-twenty, in the flush of youth and beauty, and yet with sufficient knowledge of the

world to render her the most charming companion. She has a complexion like a rose leaf, a skin as white as milk, large limpid hazel eyes, a pert nose, a coaxing mouth, and hair of a sunny brown. Fancy such a woman alighting suddenly in an out-of-the-way, dull, dried-up little hole of a station like Mudlianah, and in the midst of some twenty inflammable British officers! You might as well have sent a mitrailleuse amongst them for the amount of damage she did. They were all alight at the first view of her, and hopelessly burned up before the week was over. She is devoted to her Jack, and has in reality no eyes nor thoughts except for him ; but he has become a little used to her charms, after the manner of husbands, and so she flirts with the rest of the regiment indiscriminately, and sheds the light of her countenance on all alike, from the colonel downwards. The wives of the 145th Bengal Muftis have received Mrs Lawless but coldly. How can they look into her heart and see how entirely it is devoted to her husband? All they see is her lovely, smiling face, and contrasting it with their own less beautiful and somewhat faded countenances, they imagine that no man can be proof against her fascinations, and

jealousy reigns supreme in the 145th with regard to Cissy Lawless.

Ethel Dunstan has no need to fear a rival in her colonel's heart, because she possesses every atom of his affection, and he has proved it by years of devotion and fidelity, but when a woman is once jealous of another, she forgets everything except the fear of present loss. Colonel Dunstan is vexed when he comes in that morning from regimental duty to find his wife pale and dispirited, still more so to hear the tart replies she makes to all his tender questioning.

'Are you not well, my darling?' he asks.

'Quite well, thank you; at least as well as one can be in a hole like Mudlianah. Charlie! where have you been this morning?'

'Been, dear? Why, to mess and barracks, to be sure! Where else should I have been?'

'There are plenty of houses to call at, I suppose. What is the use of pretending to be so dull? You made a call late last night, if I am not much mistaken!'

'Last night! What, after mess? I only went home with Jack Lawless for a minute or two.'

'Did you go home with Mr Lawless?'

'Yes; at least—he didn't walk home with me exactly; but he came in soon afterwards.'

'Of course she was in bed?'

'Oh no, she wasn't. She was as brisk as a bee. We talked together for a long time.'

'So I have heard! In the garden,' remarks Mrs Dunstan pointedly.

'Yes! Was there any harm in that?' replies her husband. 'Our talk was solely on business. Is anything the matter, Ethel, darling? You are not at all like yourself this morning.'

But the only answer Mrs Dunstan gives him is indicated by her suddenly rising and leaving the room. She is not the sort of woman to tell her husband frankly what she feels. She thinks—and perhaps she is right—that to openly touch so delicate a matter as a dereliction from the path of marital duty, is to add fuel to the flame. But she suffers terribly, and in her excited condition Colonel Dunstan's open avowal appears an aggravation of his offence.

'"He is too noble to deceive me," she thinks, "and so he will take refuge in apparent frankness. He confesses he admires her, and he will tell me every time he goes there, and then he will say,—

'How can you suspect me of any wrong intention when I am so open with you?'

'Business indeed! As if he could have any business with a doll like Mrs Lawless. It is shameful of her to flirt with married men in this disgraceful way.'

Yet Mrs Dunstan and Mrs Lawless meet at the band that evening, and smile and bow to and talk with one another as if they were the best friends in the world; but the colonel is prevented by duty from doing more than arrive in time to take his wife home to dinner, and so Ethel's heart is for the while at rest. But during dinner a dreadful blow falls upon her. A note is brought to the colonel, which he reads in silence and puts into the pocket of his white drill waistcoat.

'From Mr Hazlewood, dear?' says Ethel interrogatively.

'No, my love, purely on business,' replies the colonel, as he helps himself to wine. But when the meal is concluded he walks into his dressing-room, and reappears in his mess uniform.

'Going to mess, Charlie?' exclaims his wife, in a tone of disappointment.

'No, my darling—business! I may be late. Good-night!' and he kisses her and walks out of the house.

'Business!' repeats Mrs Dunstan emphatically; and as soon as his back is turned, she is searching his suit of drill. Colonel Dunstan has not been careful to conceal or destroy the note he received at dinner. It is still in his waistcoat pocket. His wife tears it open and reads:—

'DEAR COLONEL,—Do come over this evening if possible. I have had another letter, which you must see. I depend upon you for everything. You are the only friend I have in the world. Pray don't fail me.—Ever yours gratefully,

'CISSY LAWLESS.'

'Cat!' cries Mrs Dunstan indignantly, 'deceitful, fawning, hypocritical cat! This is the way she gets over the men—pretending to each one that he is the only friend she has in the world—a married woman, too! It's disgusting! Miss MacQuirk is quite right, and some one ought to tell poor Jack Lawless of the way she is carrying on. And Charlie is as bad as she is! It was only to-day he told me as bold as brass that that creature's eyes are so innocent and guileless-looking they reminded him of little Katie's—and not ten minutes afterwards, he said my new bonnet from

England was a fright, and made me look as yellow as a guinea. Oh! what is this world coming to, and where will such wickedness end? I wish that I was dead and buried with poor mamma.' And so Mrs Dunstan cries herself to sleep, and when her husband comes home and kisses her fondly as she lies upon the pillow, he decides that she is feverish, and has not been looking well lately and must require change, and remains awake for some time thinking how he can best arrange to let her have it.

In the middle of that night, however, something occurs to occupy the minds of both father and mother to the exclusion of everything else. Little Katie, their only child, a beautiful little girl of three years old, is taken suddenly and dangerously ill with one of those violent disorders that annually decimate our British possessions in the east. The whole household is roused—Dr MacQuirk summoned from his bed—and for some hours the parents hang in mental terror over the baby's cot, fearing every minute lest their treasure should be taken from them. But the crisis passes. Little Katie is weak but out of danger, and then the consideration arises what is the best thing to facilitate her recovery.

Dr MacQuirk lets a day or two pass to allow the child to gain a little strength, and then he tells the colonel emphatically that she must be sent away at once—to England if possible—or he will not answer for her life. This announcement is a sad blow to Colonel Dunstan, but he knows it is imperative, and prepares to break the news to his wife.

'Ethel, my dear, I am sorry to tell you that MacQuirk considers it quite necessary that Katie should leave Mudlianah for change of air, and he wishes her, if possible, to go to England at once.'

'But it is *not* possible, Charlie. We could never consent to send the child home alone, and you cannot get leave again so soon. Surely it is not absolutely necessary she should go to England.'

'Not absolutely necessary, perhaps, but very advisible, not only for Katie, but for yourself. You are not looking at all well, Ethel. Your dispirited appearance worries me sadly, and in your condition you should take every care of yourself. I hardly like to make the proposal to you, but if you would consent to take Katie home to your sister's, say for a twelvemonth, I think it would do your own health a great deal of good.'

But Colonel Dunstan's allusion to her want of spirits has recalled all her jealousy of Mrs Lawless to Ethel's mind, and the journey to England finds no favour in her eyes.

'You want me to go away for a twelvemonth,' she says sharply, 'and pray what is to become of you meanwhile?'

'I must stay here. You know I cannot leave India.'

'You will stay with Mrs—, I mean with the regiment, whilst I go home with the child.'

'Yes. What else can I do?'

'Then I shall *not* go. I refuse to leave you.'

'Not even for Katie's sake?'

'We will take her somewhere else. There are plenty of places in India where we can go for change of air; and if you *cared* for me, Charlie, you would never contemplate such a thing as a whole year's separation.'

'Do you think I *like* the idea, Ethel? What should I do left here all by myself? I only proposed it for your sake and the child's.'

'I will not go,' repeats Mrs Dunstan, firmly, and she sends for Dr MacQuirk and has a long talk with him.

'Dr MacQuirk, is it an absolute necessity that Katie should go to England?'

'Not an absolute neeceessity, my dear leddy, but, from a mee-dical point of view, advisable. And your own hee-alth also—'

'Bother my health!' she cries irreverently. 'What is the nearest place to which I could take the child for change?'

'You might take her to the heels, Mrs Doonstan—to the heels of Mandalinati, which are very salubrious at this time of the year.'

'And how far off are they?'

'A matter of a coople of hundred miles. Ye canna get houses there, but there is a cairs-tle on the broo' o' the heel that ye may have for the airsking.'

'A castle! that sounds most romantic? And whom must we ask, doctor?'

The cairs-tle is the property of Rajah Mati Singh, and he bee-lt it for his ain plee-sure, but he doesna' ceer to leeve there, and so he will lend it to any Europeans who weesh for a change to the heels of Mandalinati.'

'Rajah Mati Singh! That horrid man! There will be no chance of seeing him, will there?'

'No, no, Mrs Doonstan! the Rajah will

not trouble ye! He never goes near the cairs-tle noo, and ye will have the whoole place to yersel' in peace and quietude.'

'I will speak to the colonel about it directly he comes in. Thank you for your information, Dr MacQuirk. If we must leave Mudlianah, I shall be delighted to stay for a while at this romantic castle on the brow of the hill.

'Yes,' she says to herself, when the doctor is gone, 'we shall be alone there, I and my Charlie, and it will seem like the dear old honeymoon time, before we came to live amongst these horrid flirting cats of women, and perhaps some of the old memories will come back to him and we shall be happy, foolish lovers again as we used to be long ago before I was so miserable.'

But when Colonel Dunstan hears of the proposed visit to the Mandalinati hills, he does not seem to approve of it half so much as he did of the voyage to England.

'I am not at all sure if the climate will suit you or the child,' he says, 'it is sometimes very raw and misty up on those hills. And then it is very wild and lonely. I know the castle MacQuirk means—a great straggling building standing quite by itself, and in a most exposed position. I really

think you will be much wiser to go to England, Ethel.'

'Oh, Charlie! how unkind of you, and when you know the separation will kill me!'

'It would be harder, just at first, but I should feel our trouble would be repaid. But I shall always be in a fidget about you at Mandalinati.'

'But, Charlie, what harm can happen when you are with us?'

'My dear girl, I can't go with you to the castle.'

'Why not?'

'Because business will detain me here. How do you suppose I can leave the regiment?'

'But you will come up very often to see us—every week at least; won't you, Charlie?'

'On a four days' journey! Ethel, my dear, be reasonable. If you go to Mandalinati, the most I can promise is to get a fortnight's leave after a time, and run up to see how you and the dear child are getting on. But I don't like your going, and I tell you so plainly. Suppose you are taken ill before your time, or Katie has another attack, how are you to get assistance up on those beastly hills? Think

better of it, Ethel, and decide on England. If you go, Captain Lewis says he will send his wife at the same time, and you would be nice company for each other on the way home.'

'Mrs Lewis, indeed! an empty-headed noodle! Why, she would drive me crazy before we were half-way there. No, Charlie; I am quite decided. If *you* cannot accompany me to England, I refuse to go. I shall get the loan of the castle, and try what four weeks there will do for the child.

And thus it came to pass that Mrs Dunstan's absurd jealousy of Mrs Lawless drives her to spend that fatal month at the lonely castle on the Mandalinati hills, instead of going in peace and safety to her native land. For a brief space Hope leads her to believe that she may induce Mrs Lawless to pass the time of exile with her. If her woman's wit can only induce the fatal beauty to become her guest, she will bear the loss of Charlie's society with equanimity. But though Cissy Lawless seems for a moment almost to yield, she suddenly draws back, to Mrs Dunstan's intense annoyance.

'The old castle on the hills!' she exclaimed. 'Are you and Colonel Dunstan

really going there? How delightfully romantic! I believe no end of murders have been committed there, and every room is haunted. Oh, I should like to go, too, of all things in the world! I long to see a real ghost, only you must promise never to leave us alone, colonel, for I should die of fright if I were left by myself.'

'But I shall not be there, I am sorry to say,' replies the colonel. 'My wife and Katie are going for change of air, but I must simmer meanwhile at Mudlianah.'

Pretty Cissy Lawless looks decidedly dumfoundered, and begins to back out of her consent immediately. 'I pity you,' she answers, 'and I pity myself too, for I expect we shall have to simmer together. I should like it of all things, as I said before, but Jack would never let me leave him. He is such a dear, useless body without me. Besides, as you know, colonel, I have business to keep me in Mudlianah.'

Business again! Ethel turns away in disgust; but it is with difficulty she can keep the tears from rushing to her eyes. However, there is no help for it, and she must go. Her child is very dear to her, and at all risks it requires mountain air. She must leave her colonel to take his

chance in the plains below—only as he puts her and the child into the transit that is to convey them to the hills, and bids her farewell with a very honest falter in his voice he feels her hot tears upon his cheek.

'Oh, Charlie, Charlie, be true to me! Think how I have loved you. I am so very miserable.'

'Miserable, my love, and for this short parting? Come, Ethel, you must be braver than this. It will not be long before we meet again, remember.'

'And, till then, you will be careful, won't you, Charlie, for my sake, and think of me, and don't go too much from home? and remember how treacherous women are; and I am not beautiful, I know, my darling; I never was, you know,' with a deep sob, 'like—like Mrs Lawless and others. But I love you, Charlie, I love you with all my heart, and I have always been faithful to you in thought as well as deed.' And so, sobbing and incoherent, Ethel Dunstan drives away to the Mandalinati hills, whilst the good colonel stands where she left him, with a puzzled look upon his honest sunburnt face.

'What does she mean?' he ponders, 'by saying she is not beautiful like Cissy Lawless, and telling me to remember how

treacherous women are, as if I didn't know the jades. Is it possible Ethel can be jealous—jealous of that poor, pretty little creature who is breaking her heart about her Jack? No! that would be too ridiculous, and too alarming into the bargain ; for even if I can get the boy out of the scrape, it is hardly a matter to trust to a woman's discretion. Well, well, I must do the best I can, and leave the rest to chance. Ethel to be jealous! the woman I have devoted my life to ! It would be too absurd if anything the creatures do can possibly be called so.'

And then he walks off to breakfast with the Lawlesses, though his heart is rather heavy, and his spirits are rather dull for several days after his wife starts for the castle on the hill. Ethel, on the other hand, gets on still worse than her husband. As she lies in her transit, swaying about from side to side over the rough country roads, she is haunted by the vision of Charlie walking about the garden till the small hours of the morning, hand in hand with Cissy Lawless, with a mind entirely oblivious of his poor wife and child, or indeed of anything except his beautiful companion. Twenty times would she have decided that she could bear the strain no longer, and given the order to return to

Mudlianah, had it not been for the warning conveyed in the fretful wailing of her sickly child—his child—the blossom of their mutual love. So, for Katie's sake, poor Ethel keeps steadfastly to her purpose, and soon real troubles take the place of imaginary ones, and nearly efface their remembrance. She is well protected by a retinue of native servants, and the country through which she travels is a perfectly safe one; yet, as they reach the foot of the hills up which they must climb to reach the celebrated castle, she is surprised to hear that her nurse (or Dye), who has been with her since Katie's birth, refuses to proceed any further, and sends in her resignation.

'What do you mean, Dye?' demands her mistress with a natural vexation, 'you are going to leave Katie and me just as we require your services most. What can you be thinking of? You, who have always professed to be so fond of us both. Are you ill?'

'No, missus, I not ill, but I cannot go up the hill. That castle very bad place, very cold and big, and bad people live there and many noises come, and I want to go back to Mudlianah to my husband and little children.'

'What nonsense, Dye! I didn't think you were so foolish. Who has been putting such nonsense into your head? The castle is a beautiful place, and you will not feel at all cold with the warm clothes I have given you, and we have come here to make Miss Katie well, you know, and you will surely never leave her until she is quite strong again.'

But the native woman obstinately declares that she will not go on to the Mandalinati hills, and it is only upon a promise of receiving double pay that she at last complainingly consents to accompany her mistress to the castle. Ethel has to suffer, however, for descending to bribery, as before the ascent commences every servant in her employ has bargained for higher wages, and unless she wishes to remain in the plains she is compelled to comply with their demands. But she determines to write and tell Charlie of their extortion by the first opportunity, and hopes that the intelligence may bring him up, brimming with indignation, to set her household in order. Her first view of the castle, however, repays her for the trouble she has had in getting there. She thinks she has seldom seen a building that strikes her with such a sense of importance. It is

formed of a species of white stone that glistens like marble in the sunshine, and it is situated on the brow of a jutting hill that renders it visible for many miles round. The approach to it is composed of three terraces of stone, each one surrounded by mountainous shrubs and hill-bearing flowers, and Ethel wonders why the Rajah Mati Singh, having built himself such a beautiful residence, should ever leave it for the use of strangers. She understands very little of the native language, but from a few words dropt here and there she gathers that the castle was originally intended for a harem, and supposes the rajah's wives found the climate too cold for susceptible natures. If they disliked the temperature as much as her native servants appear to do, it is no wonder that they deserted the castle, for their groans and moans and shakings of the head quite infect their mistress, and make her feel more lonely and nervous than she would otherwise have done, although she finds the house is so large that she can only occupy a small portion of it. The dining-hall, which is some forty feet square, is approached by eight doors below, two on each side, whilst a gallery runs round the top of it, supported by a stone balustrade, and containing eight more doors to

correspond with those on the ground floor. These upper doors open into the sleeping chambers, which all look out again upon open-air verandahs commanding an extensive view over the hills and plains below. Mrs Dunstan feels very dismal and isolated as she sits down to her first meal in this splendid dining-hall, but after a few days she gets reconciled to the loneliness, and sits with Katie on the terraces and amongst the flowers all day long, praying that the fresh breeze and mountain air may restore the roses to her darling's cheeks. One thing, however, she cannot make up her mind to, and that is to sleep upstairs. All the chambers are furnished, for the Rajah Mati Singh is a great ally of the British throne, and keeps up this castle on purpose to ingratiate himself with the English by lending it for their use; but Ethel has her bed brought downstairs, and occupies two rooms that look out upon the moonlit terraces. She cannot imagine why the natives are so averse to this proceeding on her part. They gesticulate and chatter —all in double Dutch, as far as she is concerned—but she will have her own way, for she feels less lonely when her apartments are all together. Her Dye goes on her knees to entreat her mistress to sleep

upstairs instead of down; but Ethel is growing tired of all this demonstration about what she knows nothing, and sharply bids her do as she is told. Yet, as the days go on, there is something unsatisfactory—she cannot tell what—about the whole affair. The servants are gloomy and discontented, and huddle together in groups, whispering to one another. The Dye is always crying and hugging the child, while she drops mysterious hints about their never seeing Mudlianah again, which make Ethel's heart almost stop beating, as she thinks of native insurrections and rebellions, and wonders if the servants mean to murder her and Katie in revenge for having been forced to accompany them to Mandalinati.

Meanwhile, some mysterious circumstances occur for which Mrs Dunstan cannot account. One day, as she is sitting at her solitary dinner with two natives standing behind her chairs, she is startled by hearing a sudden rushing wind, and, looking up, sees the eight doors in the gallery open and slam again, apparently of their own accord, whilst simultaneously the eight doors on the ground floor which were standing open shut with a loud noise. Ethel looks round; the two natives are

green with fright; but she believes that it is only the wind, though the evening is as calm as can be. She orders them to open the lower doors again, and having done so, they have hardly returned to their station behind her chair before the sixteen doors open and shut as before. Mrs Dunstan is now very angry; she believes the servants are playing tricks upon her, and she is not the woman to permit such an impertinence with impunity. She rises from table majestically and leaves the room, but reflection shows her that the only thing she can do is to write to her husband on the subject, for she is in the power of her servants so long as she remains at the castle, where they cannot be replaced.

She stays in the garden that evening, thinking over this occurrence and its remedy, till long after her child has been put to bed — and as she re-enters the castle she visits Katie's room before she retires to her own, and detects the Dye in the act of hanging up a large black shawl across the window that looks out upon the terrace.

'What are you doing that for?' cries Ethel impetuously, her suspicions ready to be aroused by anything, however trivial.

The woman stammers and stutters, and finally declares she cannot sleep without a screen drawn before the window.

'Bad people's coming and going at night here!' she says in explanation, 'and looking in at the window upon the child; and if they touch missy she will die. Missus had better let me put up curtain to keep them out. They can't do me any harm. It is the child they come for.'

'Bad people coming at night! What on earth do you mean, Dye? What people come here but our own servants? If you go on talking such nonsense to me I shall begin to think you drink too much arrack.'

'Missus, please!' replies the native with a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders; 'but Dye speaks the truth! A white woman walks on this terrace every night looking for her child, and if she sees little missy, she will take her away, and then you will blame poor Dye for losing her. Better let me put up the curtain so that she can't look in at window.'

END OF VOL. II.

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